

the book of NEHEMIAH

[A combined introduction to Ezra and Nehemiah appears immediately preceding the comment on Ezra.]

CHAPTER 1

¹ *Nehemiah, understanding by Hanani the misery of Jerusalem, mourneth, fasteth, and prayeth. 5 His prayer.*

1. The words. Heb. *debarim*, literally “words,” but also in the sense of “history” or “memoirs” (see Jer. 1:1; Amos 1:1), and is so used here.

Nehemiah. The meaning of the name Nehemiah is “Yahweh has comforted.” At least two other men of the postexilic period bore this name (see Ezra 2:2; Neh. 3:16; Neh. 7:7). Neither of these men can be Nehemiah the cupbearer of Artaxerxes, for one lived in the time of Zerubbabel, a century earlier, and the contemporary of Nehemiah was a son of Azbuk, “ruler of the half part of Beth-zur,” while the author of the book was the son of Hachaliah, governor of Judea.

The month Chisleu. It is obvious from the statement in ch. 2:1 that the 20th regnal year of King Artaxerxes is meant. For the identification of this king with Artaxerxes I, see Additional Note 2 on ch. 2. In the 20th year of Artaxerxes I the month Kislev, the 9th month (see Vol. II, p. 116), was Dec. 5, 445 through January 3, 444 B.C. (see p. 108).

Shushan the palace. Shushan, known in ancient records under the same name, though called Susa by the Greeks, was the old capital of Elam. On the Kerkha River about 100 mi. (161 km.) north of the head of the Persian Gulf, it was one of several Persian capitals. Other capital cities were Babylon, Ecbatana, and Persepolis. Shushan was primarily a winter capital, because of its unpleasantly hot summers. Some have taken Shushan to be the scene of some of Daniel’s activities (see Dan. 8:2), and of the events described in the book of Esther (see Esther 1:2). French expeditions have been excavating the ancient city intermittently since 1884 (see on Esther 1:5).

2. One of my brethren. The Hebrew word translated “brethren” is often used of more distant relatives than blood brothers (see on 1 Chron. 2:7). Hanani, however, seems likely to have been the actual brother of Nehemiah, from the similar reference to him in ch. 7:2.

I asked them. The arrival of Hanani and other Jews from the homeland seems to have been the first contact Nehemiah had been able to make with the returned exiles in Judea since the beginning of hostilities between Artaxerxes and Megabyzos, the satrap of the province called “Beyond the River,” of which Judea was a part (see on Ezra 4:10). During the period of Megabyzos’ rebellion very little reliable news from Judea seems to have reached Nehemiah, though he may have heard rumors of a Samaritan attack on Jerusalem and the destruction by them of a part of the recently rebuilt city wall. This being the case, Nehemiah would be anxious for further news. This came with the arrival of his own brother and other Jews with an eyewitness report of events that had probably taken place during the interruption of communications between Persia and Judea. See p. 350.

3. The wall of Jerusalem. Some commentators think that Hanani’s remarks refer to the destruction of the city by Nebuchadnezzar’s forces in 586 B.C. But this would hardly have been news to Nehemiah, unless it be assumed that Hanani and his companions reported merely that nothing had as yet been done by way of rebuilding the wall. Considering the shock occasioned by Hanani’s report (vs. 4–11), the events described

must have been recent. The words of Hanani do not necessarily mean that the whole wall had been destroyed and all gates burned with fire.

That only portions of the wall and some of the gates were affected is clear from the subsequent description of the building of the wall found in Neh. 3. Some sections of the wall were merely repaired (ch. 3:4, 5), while others were “built” (ch. 3:2). Similarly, some gates had to be rebuilt completely (ch. 3:1, 3), while others needed only repairs (ch. 3:6). That only a partial destruction had occurred may also be inferred from the space of time—52 days—in which Nehemiah was able to complete the rebuilding of the entire city wall (ch. 6:15). In so short a time it would have been all but impossible even under the most favorable circumstances to rebuild the entire wall, including its many gates, had it been in the condition in which Nebuchadnezzar left it. The rapid reconstruction was due not only to the great enthusiasm of both leaders and people, but also to the progress undoubtedly made under Ezra and others before the Samaritans destroyed part of it.

4. *I sat down and wept.* Nehemiah was deeply shocked when he learned about the plight of his countrymen and the humiliation they had experienced. Even if he had a partial knowledge of events in the province of Judea, the reality apparently exceeded his greatest fears and caused him to weep.

Fasted. During the Captivity fasting became a common practice among the Jews (see Zech. 7:3–7). Solemn fasts had been introduced on the anniversaries of the taking of Jerusalem, the burning of the Temple, and the murder of Gedaliah (Zech. 8:19). Fasting had also been given a prominent place in personal devotions. Daniel (Dan. 9:3; 10:3), Esther (Esther 4:16), Ezra (Ezra 10:6), and Nehemiah are all mentioned as having fasted (see on Ezra. 10:6).

5. *And said.* The opening of Nehemiah’s prayer so closely parallels the thoughts and words of Daniel’s prayer (Dan. 9:4) that it is probable he had the words of the latter before him. If so, Nehemiah was familiar with Daniel’s writings and admired their tone and spirit. Here, his words differ from those of Daniel only in the substitution of “Jehovah,” *Yahweh*, for “Lord,” *’Adonai*, and the addition of his own favorite phrase, “God of heaven.”

7. *Have not kept.* The ordinances of the law are frequently summed up under the three terms here used (Deut. 5:31; 6:1; 11:1; etc.).

8. *If ye transgress.* This is not a quotation from any particular passage in the Pentateuch, but a reference to the general sense of various passages, as, for example, Lev. 26:27–45; Deut. 30:1–5. Bible writers habitually refer to earlier inspired writings in this way, quoting the thought rather than the exact words (see on Ezra 9:11; Matt. 2:23).

10. *Thou hast redeemed.* This probably refers to deliverance from Egypt, “with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm” (Deut. 9:29; 26:8; etc.), and, more recently, from the Babylonian captivity.

11. *This day.* This phrase probably means no more than “upon this occasion,” and should not be pressed as evidence that here Nehemiah refers to the prayer he uttered on the day of his interview with the king (see ch. 2).

This man. That is, King Artaxerxes, thus far not mentioned by name, but nevertheless always in the petitioner’s mind. Nehemiah realized that the reproach of Jerusalem could be lifted only through royal intervention, and was convinced that he would have to go to Jerusalem himself in order to change the prevailing situation.

I was the king's cupbearer. Literally, "I was cupbearer to the king," not sole cupbearer but one of several. He mentions the fact here, partly to explain the meaning of "this man" to the reader and partly because it was his office that gave him access to Artaxerxes. Nehemiah is one of many examples of exiled Jews attaining to positions of influence and working in the interests of their people. Because cupbearers had contact with the inmates of the royal harem (see ch. 2:6), most of them were eunuchs. It is possible that Nehemiah was a eunuch. Some manuscripts of the LXX render the Heb. *mashqeh*, "cupbearer," as *eunouchos*, "eunuch," rather than *oinochoos*, "cupbearer."

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1–11PK 628–630

1, 2 PK 628

4, 5, 9 PK 629

11 PK 628, 630

CHAPTER 2

1 *Artaxerxes understanding the cause of Nehemiah's sadness sendeth him with letters and commission to Jerusalem.* 9 *Nehemiah, to the grief of the enemies, cometh to Jerusalem.* 12 *He vieweth secretly the ruins of the walls.* 17 *He inciteth the Jews to build in despite of the enemies.*

1. The month Nisan. Nisan in Artaxerxes I's year 20 began April 2, 444 B.C. according to the table on page 108. This text, taken with ch. 1:1, shows that Nehemiah reckoned the regnal years of a Persian king according to the Jewish civil calendar, which began in the autumn (see pp. 102, 103; also Vol. II, pp. 110, 116).

It may seem strange that Nehemiah waited three or four months after receiving the report from Jerusalem before approaching the king with his request. Several reasons may have been responsible for this delay. For one thing, the king may have been absent from his capital. But even when the king was there, his moody character (see Additional Note on Ezra 4) may have made it seem desirable to await an opportune moment for placing the petition before him. During all this time Nehemiah sought to conceal his true feelings, since he was expected to be cheerful in the presence of his king.

Artaxerxes the king. That the Artaxerxes mentioned in the book of Nehemiah is the first Persian king who bore this name, and the same king under whom Ezra returned to Jerusalem, can be demonstrated by the evidence from the Elephantine Jewish papyri (see Additional Note 2 at close of chapter).

2. Why is thy countenance sad? This kind question directed by the great king to his humble servant is his best claim to a more favorable judgment than he has generally received from historians. He is known in history as a weak ruler who often compromised the royal dignity by making terms with rebellious subjects and as readily disgracing that dignity by breaking faith with men once they were in his power. Although a weak king, he was kindhearted and gentle upon occasion. Few Persian monarchs would have been sufficiently interested in their personal attendants to notice whether or not they were sad; fewer still would have shown sympathy. Whereas a Xerxes might have ordered instant execution, Artaxerxes felt compassion and was willing to alleviate his servant's grief.

Sore afraid. Notwithstanding the king's kind and compassionate words, Nehemiah sensed danger. He appeared sad in the king's presence, and was, furthermore, about to ask permission to leave the court. Both were contrary to the fundamental assumption of Persian court life, that to bask in the light of the royal countenance was the height of

happiness. Would the king be displeased, refuse the request, dismiss him from his post, and cast him into prison; or would he pardon the apparent rudeness and grant the request?

3. *Let the king live for ever.* A common form of Oriental address to a king (1 Kings 1:31; Dan. 2:4; 3:9; etc.).

Place of my fathers' sepulchres. This statement implies that Nehemiah's family had lived in Jerusalem. Like other ancient nations, the Persians had great respect for tombs, and disapproved of their violation. Nehemiah wisely weighed his words to enlist the sympathy of Artaxerxes for his request regarding the city where his ancestors had been interred.

4. *I prayed.* Nehemiah was a man of prayer. In every danger, in every difficulty, still more in every crisis, prayers rose from his lips (chs. 4:4, 9; 5:19; 6:14; 13:14; etc.). At times, as now, his prayer was offered silently, in a fleeting moment.

6. *The queen.* According to ancient historians, women frequently played a major role in decisions taken by the king. It is told of Xerxes that he was a plaything in the hand of his wives, and that amorous adventures and harem intrigues were of greater interest to him than politics and administration. Darius II was completely ruled by his treacherous and cruel wife, Parysatis, who was at the same time his sister, and of whom it is said that she distinguished herself by her thirst for power.

The Hebrew word *shegal* is usually translated "queen," here and in Ps. 45:9, the only other place where it is used in the OT. It is from the root *shagal*, "to ravish," "to have sexual intercourse," and means "concubine," as the LXX has translated it correctly in Neh. 2:6. The discussion here reported took place in the presence of the queen. Nehemiah probably decided that this was a favorable opportunity for lodging his request—perhaps with the marked support of one of Artaxerxes' concubines who may have been favorably disposed toward Nehemiah.

I set him a time. It is not stated how much time Nehemiah requested, but it would seem probable that this did not exceed two or three years, which would be sufficient to make the journey and complete the work. From ch. 5:14 it becomes clear that Nehemiah was absent from court for 12 years, probably much longer than he originally planned. He may have received extensions of his leave of absence from time to time. It is unlikely that Nehemiah asked for a 12-year leave of absence, for so long a time would probably not have been granted him.

7. *Letters.* It is significant that Nehemiah requested no letters to the governors between Susa and northern Syria. He must have considered that part of his journey comparatively safe, for he needed no special protection there. His enemies, however, lived in Samaria, Ammon, and other provinces surrounding Judea, all of which belonged to the satrapy "Beyond the River." For his journey through that region he requested special protection and royal documents authorizing his trip. See Additional Note 1 at close of chapter.

8. *Forest.* Heb. *pardes*, a Persian loan word. In Greek this word became *paradeisos*, from which the word "paradise" is derived. In Persian, the word designates a royal park rather than a forest.

Nehemiah mentions three purposes for which wood was needed: (1) "For the gates of the palace which appertained to the house." The "house" is undoubtedly the Temple, and the "palace," the fortress at the northwest corner of the Temple area. This fortress at once

commanded and protected the Temple. The fortress seems to have been built between the time of Zerubbabel and 444 B.C., the year of Nehemiah's return, and was apparently the forerunner of the fortress of Antonia built by Herod, according to Josephus (*Antiquities* xv. 11. 4). It was originally called *Baris*, which seems to reflect the Heb. *birah*, "palace," here used by Nehemiah. (2) "For the wall of the city," especially for the gates. (3) "For the house that I shall enter into." Nehemiah had in mind either his old family mansion, which may have been lying in ruin, or a new dwelling that he may have planned to build. He apparently assumed that the powers for which he asked involved his being appointed governor of Judea, and in such a capacity he planned to build a suitable house.

The king granted me. That such a changeable king granted all Nehemiah's requests, without reservation, could only be explained as the result of divine influence. Nehemiah recognized this, and gave God the glory for his success (see on Ezra 8:18).

9. I came to the governors. Of his journey to Jerusalem Nehemiah reports only that he paid visits to the various governors through whose territories he traveled, especially in the satrapy "Beyond the River." In doing so he encountered the enemies of the Jews, who thenceforth were to be *his* deadly enemies. Being in possession of royal letters of authority, and accompanied by an escort of Persian soldiers, he experienced neither difficulty nor danger by the way.

10. Sanballat. Certain remarks made by Nehemiah (see ch. 4:1, 2) were long interpreted by scholars as indicating that Sanballat was governor of Samaria. Now one of the Elephantine papyri (Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri*, No. 30), written in the year 407 B.C., definitely settles the question with a direct reference to Sanballat as "governor of Samaria." This fact explains why he was so dangerous a foe of Nehemiah. Being more than an ordinary citizen, and with an army at his disposal (ch. 4:2), he was in a position to do much harm and was determined to frustrate Nehemiah's plans.

The Horonite. Nehemiah does not reveal Sanballat's official position, and calls him only "the Horonite." Whether this is done in contempt is uncertain. It is also uncertain whether this designation refers to Sanballat as coming from the Moabite city of Horonaim (Jer. 48:34), which has not yet been identified; or as coming from one of the two cities of Beth-horon (Joshua 16:3, 5; etc.), now *Beit 'Ur el-Foqa* and *Beit 'Ur et-Tahta*, about 12 mi. northwest of Jerusalem as the crow flies, and in Nehemiah's time belonging to Samaria. Some commentators suggest that Nehemiah's contempt for Sanballat can best be explained if the latter came from Moab, and was therefore not even a real Samaritan.

Servant. Heb. *'ebed*, "servant," sometimes used in Biblical and extra-Biblical documents to designate high government officials (2 Kings 24:10, 11; Lam. 5:8). Hence, Tobiah may have been a high official in the province of Ammon in Transjordan. The family of Tobiah later became known as one of the most influential families of Transjordan. One of his descendants was in possession of a castle in Ammon in the time of the early Ptolemies, and furnished the king of Egypt with onagers (wild asses), horses, and dogs. The ruins of his castle at *'Arâk el-Emir* are still visible, halfway between Jericho and Amman, and the name of Tobiah is carved in the walls outside the entrance to a cave.

Grieved them exceedingly. When Zerubbabel rejected the cooperation of the Samaritans in the rebuilding of the Temple (Ezra 4:3), there developed between the two peoples a spirit of animosity that persisted till the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus. This enmity may have extended to other neighboring nations, such as the Ammonites and the Arabians (see Neh. 2:19; 4:7), especially during Ezra's reform (Ezra 9, 10). Upon learning the reasons for Nehemiah's journey, and recognizing that he had come to further the interests of the people of Judah, they probably made it clear to him that they had influential connections in Jerusalem (Neh. 13:4–8, 28). This would explain the great care and secrecy with which Nehemiah carried out his initial investigations upon his arrival.

11. Three days. Compare Ezra 8:32. A few days of rest were necessary after the long journey.

12. I arose in the night. Hitherto Nehemiah had communicated his purpose to no one except the king of Persia. He expected opposition, and had decided to baffle his opponents as long as possible by concealing his exact plans. Making his survey of the wall by night, he hoped to escape observation. For this reason also he took with him only a few attendants, and but one mount. Anxious to see with his own eyes the extent of the damage to the wall and how much repair was needed, he also sought to attract as little attention as possible.

13. The gate of the valley. For an understanding of Nehemiah's nocturnal investigation (vs. 13–15), of the different sections of the wall during the course of reconstruction (ch. 3), and the dedication ceremony (ch. 12:27–43), a description of the topographical features of Jerusalem is essential. For this see Additional Note on ch. 3, and The Walls of Jerusalem in Nehemiah's Day.

Those who include the western hill in the city of Jerusalem in Nehemiah's time, locate the Valley Gate near the southwestern corner of Jerusalem, opposite the Valley of Hinnom. Those who limit the city of Nehemiah to the two eastern hills of Jerusalem locate the Valley Gate about halfway along the western wall. It was one or the other of these gates that Uzziah had fortified two centuries earlier (2 Chron. 26:9). Most probably it was the latter gate, remains of which were discovered in the English excavations of 1927, leading into the city from the Tyropoeon Valley.

The dragon well. The name "Dragon Well" appears nowhere else in the Bible. This well is generally identified with the En-rogel (Joshua 15:7; etc.), now called the Well of Job, or the Well of Nehemiah, at the junction of the Hinnom and Kidron valleys. This identification can stand only if the Hebrew expression *'el-pene*, translated "before" in the KJV, can have the meaning, "in the direction of," which is by no means certain. However, if this expression means "[passing] by" or "opposite," then the Dragon Well must have dried up since the days of Nehemiah. If so, it was situated either in the western section of the Hinnom Valley or midway in the Tyropoeon Valley, depending upon which view regarding the size of Jerusalem in Nehemiah's day is accepted.

The dung port. This gate was situated 1,000 cu. (about 1,458 ft.; 444.4 m.) from the Valley Gate (ch. 3:13). The "dung port" apparently received its name from the fact that the refuse of the city was carried through this gate to the Valley of Hinnom.

Viewed the walls. Leaving the city through the Valley Gate, Nehemiah inspected the wall from the outside in order to ascertain the extent of damage done to this part of the wall. The sections of wall enclosing the northern part of the city Nehemiah may have

been able to observe unobtrusively upon approaching Jerusalem, and during his visits to the Temple and the officials, who apparently lived in the northern quarter of the city.

14. Gate of the fountain. This gate was situated at the southeastern corner of the city, opposite the well En-rogel, now called Job's Well, or Nehemiah's Well.

The king's pool. This name appears nowhere else in the Bible. It is not certain whether Nehemiah refers to the Pool of Siloam, which was fed by the Spring of Siloam through Hezekiah's tunnel (see on 2 Kings 20:20), or the Pool of Solomon, which, according to Josephus (*Wars* v. 4. 2), was in the lower Kidron Valley. If the Pool of Siloam is meant, Nehemiah must have re-entered the city through the Gate of the Fountain but encountered so much debris in that section of the city that he returned without being able to complete his investigation. In case the Pool of Solomon is meant, then Nehemiah passed by the Gate of the Fountain and encountered an unusual amount of impassable debris in the lower Kidron Valley.

15. The brook. Probably the Kidron Valley. By riding up the valley Nehemiah could see high above him the ruined walls of Jerusalem. This was probably on a night of full moonlight. Otherwise, he would not have been able to see much, because there is considerable distance between the eastern wall on the escarpment of the southern hill and the bed of the Kidron Valley, in which he rode.

Turned back. It is not known how far Nehemiah followed the Kidron Valley northward. His survey of the wall probably did not include that part of it to the east of the Temple. He may have already known the extent of damage existing there, from previous visits to the Temple area. Retracing his steps all the way back to the Valley Gate, Nehemiah and his few companions (v. 12) re-entered the city unnoticed.

16. The rulers. On Nehemiah's arrival at Jerusalem he had found no one person exercising authority, but a number of persons called "rulers" and "nobles." The difference between these two classes is not clear. The former may have consisted of appointed officials, and the latter of family heads.

The rest. Either administrators of the city not included in the "rulers" and "nobles," or men previously engaged in rebuilding the wall.

17. Then said I. Nehemiah did not wait long before going into action. The day after his night survey of the walls, a representative body of the village and town elders assembled to hear his report. In his address he reminded them of the disgraceful state of affairs existing in the nation, recounted the divine help he had experienced in dealing with the king, and set forth the extent of his authority. His speech had the desired effect, and resulted in an enthusiastic and apparently unanimous resolution to "rise up and build."

19. Sanballat. On Sanballat and Tobiah, see on v. 10.

Geshem the Arabian. When it became evident that Sanballat was governor of Samaria (see on v. 10) and Tobiah perhaps governor of Ammon, or at least an influential leader of that nation, it was also suggested that Geshem (or Gashmu; see ch. 6:6) might have held a similar position in the Persian province of Arabia. The latter apparently included Edom, for Edom is never mentioned by Nehemiah. This supposition is corroborated by the recent discovery of inscriptions made by the Lihyanites, who displaced the Edomites in the 5th century B.C., in which a Geshem is mentioned as ruler of Dedan.

Laughed us to scorn. Either by sending messengers, as Sennacherib did (2 Kings 18:17–35), or by a formal written communication.

20. *Then answered I.* It is worthy of note that Nehemiah took no notice of the serious charge now brought against him of plotting rebellion. Neither does he refer to the royal permit he held, but rather leaves his enemies to suppose that he was acting on his own authority. He certainly must have had his reasons for sending his adversaries the answer he did.

The God of heaven. Nehemiah, a deeply religious man, knew how to depend on God. Instead of pointing to a royal decree he referred to the highest authority possible as the one from whom permission had come. Compare Zerubbabel's answer to Tatnai, "We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and build the house" (Ezra 5:11).

Ye have no portion. Even as the Samaritans' claim of the right to interfere in Jewish affairs was rejected when they came proffering their aid (Ezra 4:2, 3), so now when their meddling became hostile in character it was even more fiercely and indignantly rejected. They were told that what happened in Jerusalem was none of their business, and that they had not even so much as a place in the memory of the inhabitants. Nehemiah made it plain that he expected no interference from them, and that they should attend to the affairs of their own communities and not trouble the worshipers of the true God. Thus far Nehemiah had avoided opposition by concealing his plans, but once opposition appeared he met it boldly.

ADDITIONAL NOTES ON CHAPTER 2

Note 1

A group of Aramaic documents published in 1954 (see discussion on p. 80) includes one that may be compared to an official passport. It was drawn up by Arsham, the satrap of Egypt, who was in Susa or Babylon at the time of writing, for the use of certain of his men traveling to Egypt on official business. This document is no doubt similar to one Nehemiah received from the king, and is therefore significant to an understanding of it. Although the document is not dated, it belongs to the time of Nehemiah, because Arsham, a contemporary of Nehemiah, was satrap of Egypt for many years during the second half of the 5th century B.C.

The document is addressed to a number of officers in charge of cities or provinces on the road between Persia and Egypt, who were asked to supply provisions to the holders of this travel permit. Of the cities mentioned, only the locations of Arbel, modern Erbil in northern Iraq, and Damascus in Syria are known.

Since this document illustrates the kind of authorization Nehemiah received from Artaxerxes for his trip to Judea, a complete translation is herewith presented (see G. R. Driver, *Aramaic Documents of the Fifth Century B.C.* [1954], p. 20):

1. From Arsham to Marduk the officer who is at A[.]kad, Nabu-dala the officer who is at Lair, Zatuha the officer who is [at] Arzuhi, Apastabar the officer who is at Arbel, Hala and Matilabashi (and) Bagapat the officer (s)
2. who are at Salam, Pradaparna and Guzan the officers who are at Damascus. And now behold! one named Nehtihur, [my] officer, is going to Egypt. Do you give [him] (as) provisions from my estate in your provinces
3. every day two measures of white meal, three measures of inferior (?) meal, two measures of wine or beer, and one sheep, and for his servants, 10 men,

4. one measure of meal daily for each, (and) hay according to (the number of) his horses; and give provisions for two Cilicians (and) one craftsman, all three my servants who are going with him to Egypt, for each and

5. every man daily one measure of meal; and give them these provisions, each officer of you in turn, in accordance with the stage of his journey from province to province until he reaches Egypt;

6. and, if he is more than one day in (any) one place, do not thereafter assign them more provisions for those days. Bagasaru is cognizant of this order. Dusht is the scribe.

Note 2

Doubt as to which Artaxerxes is the Persian monarch of the book of Nehemiah has almost completely disappeared since the discovery of the Elephantine papyri. The evidence contained in some of these papyri virtually establishes the fact that Nehemiah held his office as governor of Judea under Artaxerxes I.

According to two Elephantine papyri (Cowley, papyri Nos. 30 and 31), Johanan was high priest in Jerusalem in 410 B.C. He is also mentioned in Neh. 12:22, 23 (see Ezra 10:6) as the son of the high priest Eliashib, who held office under Nehemiah (Neh. 3:1). Josephus (*Antiquities* xi. 7. 1), however, claims that Johanan was the grandson of Eliashib, which appears to agree with the statement made in Neh. 12:22 that Joiada was high priest between Eliashib and Johanan. Whether Johanan was son or grandson of Eliashib is irrelevant to our argument, however, since we are interested in finding that according to both sources, the Bible and Josephus, the high priest Eliashib of Nehemiah's time preceded the high priest Johanan, who held office in 410 B.C. This requires that Nehemiah be assigned to the reign of King Artaxerxes I, since Artaxerxes II did not begin to reign until after the time of these documents, which were contemporary with Eliashib's son or grandson.

Additional evidence comes from the mention of "Delaiah and Shelemiah, the sons of Sanballat governor of Samaria" (Cowley, No. 30, line 29). This shows that Sanballat, the most bitter foe of Nehemiah, was still governor of the province of Samaria in 407 B.C., when the letter was written (see on ch. 2:10). In view of the fact that the letter addresses its appeal to the sons of Sanballat, it seems that he must have been an old man and had transferred the administration to them. The time when Sanballat decided affairs alone seems to have been a thing of the past, and since the work of Nehemiah clearly lay in the period when Sanballat was actively in charge of the affairs of state in Samaria, it becomes evident that the only Artaxerxes under whom Nehemiah could have held office was Artaxerxes I, who died in 423 B.C.

Few scholars during recent years have doubted that the Artaxerxes of Nehemiah was Artaxerxes I.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1–20PK 630–638

2 PK 630, 631

3, 4 PK 631

4 SC 103; TM 201

5 PK 632

8, 9 PK 633

10 PK 635

11–16PK 636

17 PK 637
18–20PK 638
20 PK 640

CHAPTER 3

The names and order of them that builded the wall.

1. Then Eliashib. It is fitting to find Eliashib the high priest setting a right example on this occasion. Later on he became “allied” by marriage to Tobiah (ch. 13:4) and was guilty of profaning the Temple (ch. 13:5). According to the line of high priests given in ch. 12:10, 11, it appears that Eliashib was the son of Joiakim, and the grandson of Jeshua, who had returned from Babylon with Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:2; 3:2).

The special purpose of this chapter seems to be the rendering of honor where honor was due—the placing on record of the names of the men who nobly came to the front on this important occasion, sacrificed ease to duty, and thereby exposed themselves to a threatened hostile attack (ch. 4:18–20).

With his brethren. That is, the priests in general. That the priests undertook the building of a portion of the eastern wall, in addition to the work here mentioned, is apparent from v. 28.

The sheep gate. This gate seems to have been completely in ruins. It was at the eastern end of the north wall, which here marked the limits of the Temple compound (see The Walls of Jerusalem in Nehemiah’s Day). The sheep market was probably in its neighborhood and gave to the gate its name (see John 5:2).

They sanctified it. This appears to have been a preliminary dedication, distinct from that described in ch. 12:27–43. Having completed the Sheep Gate and the wall extending westward as far as the Tower of Hananeel, the priests anticipated the general dedication by a special one of their own, thus acknowledging the sacred character of the work at the earliest possible moment.

The tower. The towers of Meah (Heb. *Hamme’ah*, literally, “the hundred”) and Hananeel, apparently belonged to the Temple fortress (see on ch. 2:8). Since no building activity at the towers is mentioned, they seem to have been intact.

2. The men of Jericho. The portion of the wall next to Eliashib was rebuilt by the citizens of Jericho. That Jericho was part of the restored Judea is apparent from Ezra 2:34.

Zaccur. The sections of the wall listed seem to have been of varying length, and the amount of labor necessary to restore them seems to have varied also. For some sections the delegation from an entire city was responsible, while, as in the case of Zaccur, a single man or a family took charge of another section. Zaccur was a Levite who later signed a special covenant between the people and God (ch. 10:12).

3. The fish gate. This gate was probably near the fish market where the Tyrians sold their fish (ch. 13:16). It seems to have been located in the middle of the northern wall (see also Neh. 12:39; 2 Chron. 33:14; Zeph. 1:10).

The sons of Hassenaah. See on Ezra 2:35.

Locks. Heb. *man’ulim*, translated “locks” in the KJV and “bolts” in the RSV, is of obscure meaning. It has been suggested that this word designates bars, hinges, or straps.

Bars. This word, correctly translated “bars,” appears frequently in the Bible and designates the crossbars by means of which the gates might be bolted from the inside.

4. Meremoth. A member of one of the priestly families that had not been able to establish its identity at the time of Zerubbabel (see Ezra 2:61). He had been a traveling companion of Ezra (Ezra 8:33; cf. Neh. 3:21). Now he built two sections of the wall (Neh. 3:21), and some months later signed the covenant (ch. 10:5).

Meshullam. One of the chief men who accompanied Ezra 13 years earlier on his return from Babylon (Ezra 8:16). He now took the responsibility of building two wall sections (Neh. 3:30), and later signed the covenant of Nehemiah as a tribal head (ch. 10:20). Although he was a loyal supporter of Nehemiah's cause, Nehemiah complains that he had given his daughter to a son of the enemy, Tobiah (ch. 6:18).

5. The Tekoites. The people of Tekoa, a small town about 5 mi. south of Bethlehem now called *Teqû'*. From Tekoa came the "wise woman" whom Joab sent to influence David to bring Absalom home (2 Sam. 14:2, 3). Its small size seems to have been responsible for the fact that it does not appear either in the city and town list of those who returned with Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:20–35) or the census list of Neh. 11:25–36.

Repaired. Few in number, the Tekoites were assigned a wall section that needed repair but not thorough rebuilding. Nevertheless, they seem to have been so full of zeal that they assumed responsibility for repairing also a second section of the wall (v. 27).

The nobles. The upper classes, *'adirim*, literally, "exalted ones," withdrew from the work, as oxen withdraw their necks from the yoke (see Jer. 27:11, 12). They stood aloof, leaving the work to the common people. This is the first case of passive opposition recorded by Nehemiah. Later, other cases are found in his report.

6. Old gate. Heb. *sha'ar hayyeshanah*, meaning literally "the gate of oldness," or in English simply "the old gate." Though the Hebrew construction has given rise to many variant translations, there is no need of assuming a textual error, as most translators and commentators have done. Some commentators have suggested that the word for "city" has been lost, and read "the gate of the old city." But this suggestion is equally unacceptable, since the "old gate" was in a section of the wall that enclosed the latest addition to the city. The LXX translates *yeshanah* as a proper name, *Isana*. The Hebrew would then read, the "Yeshanah gate." The gate may have received its name from the city of Jeshanah, now *Burj el-Isâneh*, northwest of Baal-hazor, which is about 15 mi. north of Jerusalem (2 Chron. 13:19). The "old gate" is usually identified with the "corner gate" of 2 Kings 14:13 and Jer. 31:38, which was situated at the northwest corner of the city wall.

7. The Gibeonite. Gibeon is now *ej-Jib*, 6 mi. (9.6 km.) northwest of Jerusalem.

The Meronothite. The location of Meronoth is unknown. It must have been near Gibeon and Mizpah (see 1 Chron. 27:30).

Mizpah. Probably the site of *Tell en-Nasbeh*, 8 mi. (14.4 km.) north of Jerusalem.

Unto the throne of the governor. The meaning of the phrase thus translated is uncertain. It designates either the region from which the builders of this section of the wall came or the extent of their activity on the wall. According to the first interpretation, these men came from Gibeon, Meronoth, Mizpah, and as far north as the seat of the governor of the province "Beyond the River," which would mean that some isolated Jews had come from the satrap's residence at Damascus or Aleppo. According to the second interpretation the "throne of the governor" was the residence of the satrap when he came

to Jerusalem on official business. If so, the building must have been in close proximity to the wall.

8. The goldsmiths. The skilled craftsmen, such as goldsmiths and pharmacists, may not have belonged to recognized family or city units, like the other builders, and so were listed separately.

Fortified. Heb. *'azab*, perhaps "to prepare." The LXX renders *'azab*, "they left," an alternative reading also given in the KJV margin. But such a translation of the word in this context would be meaningless, even though *'azab* has some such meaning in all other passages where it is found. Most translators have surmised that it was a technical term used in building. In the recently discovered texts of Ras Shamrah a word *'adab* is frequently used, with the meaning "to make," "to prepare," "to set." Since in a related Semitic language the letter *d* can replace the Hebrew *z* as it also does in Aramaic, there is little doubt that the *'adab* of the Ras Shamrah texts is the equivalent of the *'azab* of Neh. 3:8, and that the KJV translation is at least approximately correct.

The broad wall. An unknown topographical detail at Jerusalem.

9. The half part of Jerusalem. The city itself does not seem to have been so divided; however, the territory outside the wall was considered as belonging to it, as is implied by the LXX. This surrounding territory was probably divided into two portions, and a ruler was put over each one (see v. 12).

10. Over against his house. The part of the wall repaired by Jedaiah lay in front of his own house, which was probably adjacent to or near the wall. He would naturally take special interest in the restoration of the part of the wall that would ensure him protection. The same expression, or similar expressions, are found in vs. 23, 28–30.

11. The other piece. Literally, "a second piece." It is implied that the longer sections of the wall were divided between two companies of workmen. But then it seems strange that in none of these instances is a first portion mentioned; the second alone is mentioned (see vs. 19–21, 24, 27, 30). However, in two of the seven cases where a second portion is mentioned, the builders are previously listed as also being engaged on another section of the wall. Perhaps the same was true of the other five instances, though this is not apparent in the record as it stands today.

The tower of the furnaces. Or, "the Tower of the Ovens" (RSV). It is mentioned again in ch. 12:38, and must have been on the western wall, though its exact position cannot be determined.

12. Daughters. Most interpreters prefer the translation, "villages" (see ch. 11:25–31, where the Hebrew word is thus translated). These would be villages over which Shallum ruled as head of half a district. Some commentators, however, accept a literal interpretation, thinking that Shallum's daughters aided him in the work. This view cannot be rejected on ethical grounds, since it is not uncommon in the East for women to do heavy work.

13. The valley gate. See on ch. 2:13.

Zanoah. This town lay in the vicinity of Beth-shemesh, about 14 mi. (22.4 km.) southwest of Jerusalem as the crow flies. The site is now called *Khirbet Zanû'*.

A thousand cubits. An important topographical notation giving the distance between the Valley Gate and the Dung Gate as 1,458 ft. (444.4 m.). Some have doubted that one

group could repair so large a section and accordingly have interpreted the words as a topographical parenthesis giving the distance between the two gates. But the expression is specific. Probably some parts of the wall were less severely damaged than others, and could therefore be easily repaired.

14. Dung gate. See on ch. 2:13, where the same Hebrew words are rendered “dung port.”

Beth-haccerem. Usually identified with *‘Ain Kârim*, 4 mi. (7.2 km.) west of Jerusalem, but recently with *Ramoth Rahel*, 21/2 mi. (3.2 km.) south of Jerusalem.

15. Gate of the fountain. See on ch. 2:14.

Ruler of part of Mizpah. That is, of the district of Mizpah, as distinguished from the town of Mizpah (see v. 19; see on v. 7).

Siloah. Also spelled Shiloah (Isa. 8:6) and Siloam (John 9:7, 11). There was also a town known as Siloam (Luke 13:4), now *Silwân*, on the southwestern slopes of the Mt. of Olives. The rock tunnel that still supplies the Pool of Siloam from the spring Gihon in the Kidron Valley was constructed by Hezekiah (see on 2 Kings 20:20). It was in this conduit that the famous Siloam inscription was found (see Vol. II, p. 87, for a translation).

The king’s garden. This lay in the southern part of the Kidron Valley where the inhabitants of *Silwân* now have their vegetable gardens.

The stairs. Not identified. Since the “City of David” lay on the southeastern hill, a flight of steps from the upper city to the vicinity of the Pool of Siloam in the southern and lowermost part of the walled city must be meant.

16. Nehemiah the son of Azbuk. Not to be confused with the author of the book of Nehemiah.

Beth-zur. A city that became famous in the time of the Maccabees, and now called *Khirbet et-Tubeiqah*. It lies about 4 mi. (6.4 km.) north of Hebron. American expeditions excavated it in 1931 and 1957.

The sepulchres of David. These tombs, situated within the city (Kings 2:10; 11:43; etc.), were still known in the time of the apostles (Acts 2:29), but a knowledge of their exact location has since been lost.

Pool that was made. An artificial pool, otherwise unknown.

House of the mighty. Location unknown. It must have been the military headquarters or the armory.

17. Keilah. Today *Khirbet Qîla*, 8 mi. northwest of Hebron. Keilah played an important role in David’s early history (see 1 Sam. 23:1), and lay near the Philistine border.

19. Another piece. See on v. 11. Ezer is not previously mentioned as repairing any portion of the wall, though “the men of ... Mizpah” are so listed (v. 7). Ezer apparently either was their leader or replaced the original leader.

The going up. The clause thus introduced was understood by any contemporary of Nehemiah, but is not clear to us. There were probably several armories in Jerusalem (see Isa. 22:8). The one here called “the armoury at the turning [or, of the corner],” was apparently situated at a turn in the eastern wall. Either steps or a pathway led to it from the Kidron Valley.

20. Baruch. Baruch has the high honor of being singled out for special praise. He rapidly accomplished the first task assigned him, mention of which is not made in Nehemiah's list (see on v. 11), and now undertook a second piece.

Earnestly repaired. Though the construction of the Hebrew is difficult and its rendering somewhat uncertain, the KJV translation seems to be the best that can be made.

The door of the house. Mention of the "door" may imply that Eliashib's house was too wide to serve satisfactorily as a defining mark. This remark reveals that the residence of the high priest was located south of the Temple near the eastern wall.

21. Meremoth. His first "piece" is mentioned in v. 4. The second "piece" cannot have been very long, since its extent was apparently along only a portion of the high priest's house.

22. The priests. These men, more specifically identified as men of the "plain," Heb. *kikkar*, must have owned property in the lower Jordan valley. *Kikkar* usually refers to the region near Jericho.

23. Azariah. Azariah was the priest who shared with Ezra the duty of reading and explaining the law (ch. 8:7). He was also a signatory to the solemn covenant of Nehemiah (ch. 10:2). Later he took part in the dedication of the wall (ch. 12:33).

24. Unto the turning. Neither the turn nor the corner here mentioned can be located, but a glance at The Walls of Jerusalem in Nehemiah's Day shows that the eastern wall was far from running in a straight line, as excavations have revealed.

25. High house. In the Hebrew it is uncertain whether the word translated "high" describes the "tower" or the "house." Most commentators attach it to the word "tower." The "king's high house," to the south of the Temple area, is probably none other than the old palace of David, which once stood in this quarter of the city, while Solomon's palace was built on the northeastern hill. David's palace, like that of Solomon (Jer. 32:2), would naturally have its own prison. From this prison the "prison gate" of ch. 12:39 took its name.

26. In Ophel. Ophel seems to have been the name of the northern section of the eastern hill, that is, the site of David's City, bordering on the southern limits of the Temple area. Here many of the Temple personnel lived, even as late as the time of Christ.

The water gate. This must have been a gate in the eastern wall which overlooked the spring of Gihon in the Kidron Valley, so named from the fact that water from the spring was carried in through this gate.

The tower that lieth out. This may be the tower whose ruins were excavated by English archeologists from 1923 to 1925, high above the Virgin's Spring (Gihon) in the Kidron Valley.

27. The Tekoites. See on v. 5.

28. The horse gate. The site of the Horse Gate appears, from 2 Chron. 23:15 as compared with 2 Kings 11:6, not to have been far distant from the Temple and the royal palace, while a comparison of Neh. 3:27 and 28 indicates that it stood in the neighborhood of the wall of Ophel, and might appropriately be regarded as belonging to it. It was probably located at the southeastern corner of the Temple area, on the slopes of Mt. Moriah.

29. Zadok. Probably head of the priestly order of Immer (Ezra 2:37).

Shemaiah. Shemaiah the son of Shechaniah, keeper of the east gate, can hardly be identified with the Shemaiah of 1 Chron. 3:22, a lineal descendant of King David.

The east gate. Probably a Temple gate in the eastern wall, identified by some with the Horse Gate of v. 28. Shemaiah is mentioned as keeper of the east gate and not as repairer of it. It is therefore possible that the gate was intact and needed no repair. Where he worked is not indicated. He was probably one of the priests (see ch. 12:6).

30. Hananiah. Perhaps the priest who took part in the dedication of the wall (ch. 12:41).

Meshullam. See on v. 4.

31. The goldsmith's son. See on v. 8.

The place of the Nethinims. Since the Nethinims resided in Ophel (v. 26), this "place of the Nethinims" must have been an office building connected with the Temple.

The merchants. The "place" here designated seems not to have been the residence of merchants but a warehouse, perhaps for spices or incense needed in the Temple service.

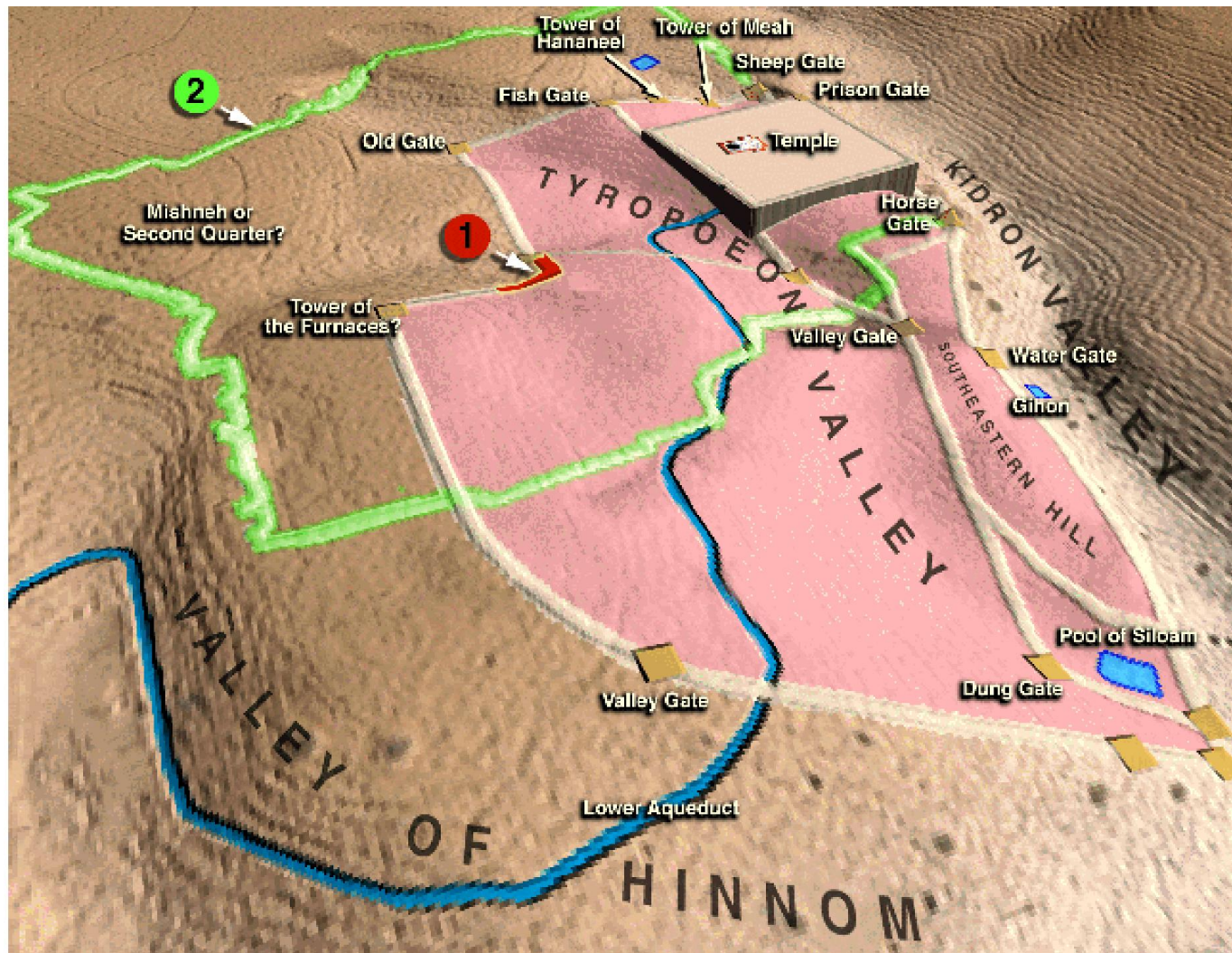
Miphkad. Heb. *miphqad*, also translated "enrollment" or "sum" (2 Sam. 24:9; 1 Chron. 21:5) and "commandment" (2 Chron. 31:13). Here it seems to be the name of a specific place in the Temple area, as in Eze. 43:21, where it is rendered "appointed place." Some commentators have suggested that "the gate Miphkad" was so named because of the fact that it led to the particular part of the Temple area Ezekiel refers to. Inasmuch as this question has not yet been settled, it is preferable to continue the rendering of the name of this gate as in the KJV. It must have been located in the northern part of the eastern Temple wall, and may have been close to the present "Golden Gate" of the *Haram esh-Sherîf*.

32. The sheep gate. See on v. 1. The circuit of the wall is completed.

The Walls of Jerusalem in Nehemiah's Day

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¹Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ne 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.



ADDITIONAL NOTE ON CHAPTER 3

To understand fully the account of Nehemiah's nocturnal investigation of the ruined walls (ch. 2:13–15), the description of the building of the wall (ch. 3), and the dedication of the wall (ch. 12:27–43), it is necessary to know the topography of Jerusalem.

The Walls of Jerusalem in Nehemiah's Day shows several hills and valleys in Jerusalem or its immediate vicinity. Flanking Jerusalem on the west is the Valley of Hinnom, from which rises the western hill of the city. Skirting the western hill on the south, the valley turns east to meet the Kidron Valley at the spring En-rogel, now called Job's, or Nehemiah's, Fountain (2,000 ft. above sea level). To the east of the western hill, and between it and Mt. Moriah and Mt. Zion, the two eastern hills, is the Tyropoeon (Cheesemakers') Valley. The name of this valley, not mentioned in the Bible, is given by Josephus. The third main valley is that of the Kidron, which separates the eastern hills of the city from the Mt. of Olives. Midway in this valley lies the perennial spring of the Gihon (2,087 ft.), now called Virgin's Spring.

The western hill, since medieval times erroneously called Zion, is the highest (2,525 ft.) hill of Jerusalem. The Temple hill, Mt. Moriah, is next highest (2,427 ft.), while the southeastern hill slopes from the Temple hill to 2,082 ft. at its most southern part.

The old view that the City of David was situated on the western hill, reflected in its traditional name Zion, has long since been abandoned. Archeological investigations of the last 75 years have clearly shown that the old fortress of the Jebusites, later the City of David, or Zion, was located on the southeastern hill, and that the Temple lay on the northeastern hill.

Originally the city wall surrounded only the citadel, located on the southeastern hill by the earliest settlers because of its proximity to at least two water sources, Gihon in the Kidron Valley and En-rogel at the point where the Kidron and Hinnom valley meet. Possibly a third spring, no longer flowing, the “dragon well” of Neh. 2:13, may have been in the Tyropoeon Valley or in the western part of the Hinnom Valley.

Solomon built the Temple on the northeastern hill, Moriah, and in the space between this area and the City of David built his palace. The city thus had an elongated shape. Many scholars have thought that the western hill was included in the city’s defense system at an early date, possibly during Solomon’s reign.

Since 1967 extensive excavations carried out under the direction of Jewish archeologists have greatly increased our knowledge about ancient Jerusalem. Only the discovery of a section of the west western wall by Prof. N. Avigad, mentioned above, is really pertinent to our study here. Most of the findings made during the post-six-day war period concern the Herodian city, the city with which Jesus was familiar during His earthly ministry.

However, part of the wall built by Nehemiah was identified by K. Kenyon during her excavations on the eastern slope of the southeastern hill, just above the Gihon Spring. This discovery shows that at least at this point Nehemiah’s wall did not follow the course of the earlier wall, but was constructed higher up, near the ridge of the hill, and more to the west of the pre-exilic wall. If this was done also in other parts of the city, the size of Nehemiah’s Jerusalem would have been considerably smaller than that of the earlier city.

While the discoveries of N. Avigad and K. Kenyon have provided us with much new and most-helpful information, we are still more or less in the dark about the course of the city walls in Old Testament times as far as details go.

It is certain that the city of David was limited to the southeastern hill and that Solomon extended the city to the north, enclosing most of the area that is now known as the Haram esh-Sherif. On this northern hill, known also as Temple Hill, the Temple and royal palace structures were erected. How far the city was expanded toward the west at that time, if at all, is still not known, although it is certain that after 700 B.C. part of the Western Hill was incorporated in the walled city, and that the city of Jerusalem retained this size until its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar.

Since the size of Nehemiah’s city is uncertain the Walls of Jerusalem in Nehemiah’s Day presents two possibilities, with two possible locations for the Broad Wall, the Tower of the Furnaces, the Valley Gate, and the Dung Gate. If Nehemiah, in the main, restored Jerusalem to its pre-exilic size, the area enclosed in the west by the wall indicated on the map was included. On the other hand, it is possible that his city, with its small post-exilic population, was limited to the size of Solomon’s. In that case its

walls ran approximately a course indicated by the thick pale lines on the map of The Walls of Jerusalem in Nehemiah's Day.

During the excavations carried out by Prof. N. Avigad in 1970 and 1971 a 40-meter-long curved section of the pre-exilic city wall, 7 meters thick, was discovered—marked by a green line on the map of The Walls of Jerusalem in Nehemiah's Day which proves that portions of the Western Hill were incorporated into the pre-exilic city. The excavators have dated this newly discovered portion of the old city wall to about 700 B.C., which, if, correct, would make King Hezekiah its builder. (See *Israel Exploration Quarterly*, 22 [1972], 193–195.) That this king of Judah was engaged in the building and strengthening of Jerusalem's fortifications is attested in 2 Chron. 32:5. However, it is not known whether Nehemiah's walls followed the course of the pre-exilic wall exactly.

The western part of the city, called the Mishneh in the time of Josiah, is referred to in 2 Kings 22:14, RSV. Its construction in the time of King Hezekiah had probably doubted the size of the earlier walled city.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1 PK 638

5, 28 PK 639

28–305T 342

CHAPTER 4

1 *While the enemies scoff, Nehemiah prayeth and continueth the work. 7 Understanding the wrath and secrets of the enemy, he setteth a watch. 13 He armeth the labourers, 19 and giveth military precepts.*

1. Sanballat. See on ch. 2:10. Nehemiah's arrival and the preparations for the rebuilding of the wall had been a cause of annoyance to Sanballat and his evil allies, but when the actual building activity started they could no longer restrain themselves.

2. The army of Samaria. The province of Samaria apparently maintained armed forces, with Sanballat as commander in chief. With documentary evidence at hand proving that Sanballat was governor of Samaria (see on ch. 2:10), it no longer seems strange to find him described as a military leader.

3. Tobiah. See on ch. 2:10. As on previous occasions, he seems to have met Sanballat to discuss the course of action to be taken, now that the Jews had actually begun construction.

4. Hear, O our God. Prayer was a habit with Nehemiah, not merely the sudden outburst of emotional impulse (see chs. 5:19; 6:9, 14; 13:14, 22, 29, 31). As in a previous prayer he had used words apparently taken from Daniel (see on ch. 1:5), he now borrows the language of Jeremiah (last part of Neh. 4:4, cf. Jer. 12:3; 17:18; and 18:21, 22; and first part of Neh. 4:5, cf. Jer. 18:23).

6. Unto the half thereof. According to ch. 3 many companies of workmen were busy on various sections of the wall simultaneously. The expression "unto the half" must therefore mean half of the height, not half of the circumference; furthermore, it is expressly stated that "all the wall was joined together." This interpretation alone is consistent with the further remark that "the breaches began to be stopped" (v. 7). This rapid progress came because "the people had a mind to work."

7. The Arabians. Three neighboring nations now ally themselves with the Samaritans against the Jews. The Arabians were led into the alliance by Geshem (ch. 2:19), and the Ammonites by Tobiah (ch. 2:10). The inhabitants of the city and vicinity of Ashdod, in

the coast district of Philistia, were perhaps encouraged by Sanballat of Samaria to renew their ancient hatred of Judah.

That the walls. The clause thus introduced reads literally “that there came up a healing on the walls of Jerusalem.” The picture is of the new flesh that grows on a wound as it heals.

8. Conspired all of them together. The LXX and the Vulgate read: were all “gathered together.” These translators evidently supposed that in view of what had already taken place it was hardly necessary to suppose that only now was a conspiracy being formed (see chs. 2:19, 20; 4:1–3). According to the LXX the leaders of the opposition assembled a considerable force, with the purpose of attacking Jerusalem, probably expecting that a show of strength would frighten the unwarlike builders and bring their work to a halt.

It. Heb. *lo*, literally, “to him,” or, “to it.” The statement is obscure. If it refers to the city of Jerusalem, it should have the feminine ending *lah*; but if it refers to Nehemiah, it should read *li*, “me.” The phrase should be translated, “to put me [or ”her,” if the city is meant] in confusion.”

9. Set a watch. Like all wise leaders, Nehemiah kept himself informed of the movements of the enemy. To be prepared for a surprise attack he stationed a guard both day and night, doubtless at outposts some distance beyond the city walls. The community was pious and trusted in divine protection, but this did not keep them from doing everything within their own power. Human effort is to be united with divine power.

10. Judah said. The vigilant guard duty and continuous labor pressed heavily upon the people and discouraged them. Their complaint is expressed in poetic form and may have been a song composed and sung by the burden bearers. In Hebrew it consists of ten words, two sentences of two lines each. The first line of each sentence is composed of three words and the second line of two. The last words of the first and third lines rhyme, and originally the second and fourth may have also. The following translation represents an attempt to render the original thought in poetical form:

Too weak is the carriers' strength
and too much the debris;
And we are not able
to rebuild the wall.

11. They shall not know. Discouragement increased with word from their enemies that they planned to take the city by surprise and slay the workmen. Nehemiah's vivid account of what the Jews and their enemies were saying (vs. 10, 11) reflects the forces with which he, as leader, had to contend. The least wavering on his part would have brought the work to a halt.

12. Whence ye shall return unto us. The Hebrew of this clause is obscure. A slight transposition of the letters of one Hebrew word gives the RSV rendering of the entire statement, “From all the places where they live they will come up against us.” This at least makes sense and is appropriate to the context. The meaning of v. 12 thus seems to be that ostentatious movements of the enemy forces, and the rumors of impending attack that they purposely circulated, frightened the Jews living in the border regions of Judea, and perhaps some in enemy territory, to flee to Jerusalem for safety. They brought the alarming report that their enemies were about to attack from all sides; Sanballat and the Samaritans from the north, the Ammonites from the east, the Arabians from the south,

and the Philistines (Ashdodites) from the west (see PK 642). The expression “ten times” gives emphasis to the urgency with which the refugees pressed their report and the devastating effect it had on the workmen. Sanballat was counting on a war of nerves to frighten the Jews into inactivity.

13. *Set I in the lower places.* The first part of v. 13 is obscure. It appears that at the more vulnerable points along the wall, where attack was most likely, Nehemiah posted armed men in conspicuous positions in the hope of forestalling an attack. The grouping of men by families would tend to impress upon each of them the fact that he was fighting for his own kin. The enemy may have advanced to positions opposite the “lower,” or more vulnerable, parts of the rapidly rising wall and was feigning preparations to attack when Nehemiah’s prompt action thwarted their plan by making it clear that the Jews were ready to fight if necessary.

14. *I looked.* A particular occasion seems indicated, perhaps at a moment when the hostile allies had joined forces and were advancing. This short but stirring appeal seems to have been made in anticipation of imminent attack. That no clash followed seems to indicate that when the enemy approached and from a distance saw the Jews awaiting them in perfect order and well armed, they retired. Whether or not they ever intended actually to fight is not clear.

16. *My servants.* Probably members of the personal retinue of Nehemiah, Jews placed at his disposal as governor. The list of ch. 3 implies that the work was begun by Judean Jews. But when the situation became more tense and difficult, Nehemiah assigned his personal assistants to the work of construction and his personal bodyguard to guard duty.

The rulers were behind. Probably the foremen. These men stood “behind” the laborers to direct their work and to lead them in the defense of the city if the enemy ventured to attack.

17. *They which builded on the wall.* Or, “who were building on the wall” (RSV). This clause belongs to v. 16, and explains which members of “all the house of Judah” are meant.

With those that laded. Not a different group of workmen from those “that bare burdens,” as the Hebrew makes clear. The meaning is that the burden bearers were loaded in such a way that they could carry their load with one hand, with the other free to carry a weapon. In case of attack every man was thus ready to defend himself simply by discarding his burden.

18. *The builders.* Since the builders needed both hands for their work, they wore swords in their girdles, and were thus ready to go into battle with their foes at a moment’s notice.

He that sounded the trumpet. Trumpeters are pictured as signalmen in both Egyptian and Assyrian sculptures of war scenes.

19. *Separated upon the wall.* As is apparent from the work assignments of ch. 3, the builders were scattered around the entire circuit of the walls, so that at any one point there would normally be but a small body of men.

20. *God shall fight for us.* Nehemiah’s confidence in divine help was contagious. He himself set a noble example, not only for his contemporaries, but also for us in our mortal combat with the powers of evil. We can be confident that God will fight for us when we labor earnestly to build up His cause, when we attempt to overcome Satan, sin, and self, and when our motives are pure, our trust strong, and our weapons untarnished.

21. *So we laboured.* A summary of vs. 16–20.

Till the stars appeared. Construction went forward from dawn till dusk; the men worked under pressure to complete the task. In view of the fact that enemy forces were lurking in the vicinity, speed was of the utmost importance. Every stone laid added to the security of the city. Night shifts were hardly possible in ancient times, but full advantage was taken of the first and last rays of light each day.

22. *Lodge within Jerusalem.* Many of the people lived outside of Jerusalem and had probably been accustomed to return to their respective villages at the close of each day's work. Now they were requested to remain within the city at night for added protection. The very fact that they were there, and known to be there, would tend to prevent an attack; and if the enemy should make an assault by night, they would be at hand, able to take their part in guarding the work.

23. *My brethren.* Actual blood brothers are probably meant. That Nehemiah had brothers appears from ch. 1:2, and that one of them, Hanani, had accompanied him to Jerusalem is evident from ch. 7:2.

Put them off for washing. The meaning of the Hebrew expression thus translated is obscure. It reads literally, "each his weapon the water." The KJV translation is taken from the Vulgate, which is here more of an interpretation than a translation. The LXX omits the statement altogether. The RSV reads, "each kept his weapon in his hand." Some have modified the last Hebrew word of the verse so that the statement would read, "each his weapon was in his right hand." Others have tried to explain the Hebrew words as they stand by interpreting the passage to mean, "each man's weapon was his water," that is, the weapons were a substitute for water, or that a man's only bath was his weapon. According to this interpretation, the passage is idiomatic, perhaps an expression used by soldiers to describe the rigors of a campaign. According to other proposed readings, the workmen did not remove their clothing, "either by night or by day," or "everywhere went his weapon to the water."

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1–23PK 641–645

1 3T 574

1, 2 PK 641

3 PK 642

4 3T 574

6 Ed 286

6–8PK 642

7, 8 3T 571

9 PK 659; 3T 572

9, 10, 12–18PK 643

10, 14 GC 56

17 AA 597

18 GC 56

20 PK 645

20–23PK 644

CHAPTER 5

1 *The Jews complain of their debt, mortgage, and bondage. 6 Nehemiah rebuketh the usurers, and causeth them to make a covenant of restitution. 14 He forbeareth his own allowance, and keepeth hospitality.*

1. A great cry. It is uncertain when some of the events described in this chapter took place. Not all of them can have occurred during the building of the wall, since v. 14 carries the record to the close of Nehemiah's 12 years as governor. At best only vs. 1–13 can be assigned to the time of building the wall. It is true that labor on the wall without pay would take many away from their ordinary means of livelihood. On the other hand, the work was completed in too short a time to occasion serious economic distress, especially of the kind here described. There is no hint in the narrative that the distress was connected with the work of reconstruction. The grievances lay much deeper, and had been developing over a long period of time, but came to a crisis during the building of the wall (see PK 646). In vs. 14–19 Nehemiah gives an account of his personal conduct while in office as governor of Judea (see 1 Sam. 12:3–5).

The cry was one of dire distress. The plaintiffs were the poor among the people, and the defendants their more well-to-do brethren (see 2 Kings 24:14).

2. Many. Those who had large families were foremost in making complaint. Their numerous offspring proved not to be the blessing they were usually considered by Orientals, but a burden and the cause of deep perplexity to them.

3. That we might buy corn. Perhaps, with the LXX, "therefore give us corn [grain]," not that they desired an outright gift, but an adjustment of the economic situation that occasioned their plight.

Because of the dearth. Some claimed relief because of a famine, now past, which had compelled them to mortgage their fields, vineyards, and houses. The plaintiffs therefore belonged to a class that once possessed considerable property, and who lived outside the city. The situation resembles that described in Isa. 5:8. The gathering of the land into the hands of the rich was not a new situation.

4. The king's tribute. Like other Persian provinces, Judea was annually required to pay a tribute, partly in money and partly in kind, to the Persian treasury. In ordinary years this burden may not have seemed oppressive, but in lean years the appearance of the tax collector often foreshadowed great misery. To meet the tax debts had to be contracted, and without hope that they could be repaid.

5. Our flesh. These poor people were human beings, like their richer brethren, and stood in need of the necessities of life as much as they. Their own children were as dear to them as were children of the rich to their parents.

One class of people complained of families so large that it was impossible to provide them with food, another of having mortgaged their property because of famine, a third of having to resort to the moneylenders in order to pay their taxes, and a fourth of having fallen into the hands of usurious moneylenders. These people were suffering, not from the oppression of foreign tyrants, but from the exactions of their brethren.

Some of our daughters. On the legal right of fathers to sell their daughters see Ex. 21:7. Many of the returned exiles had escaped from Babylonian captivity only to find themselves in bondage to their brethren, and the latter state seemed more unbearable than the first. In Babylon the families remained united, but now children were taken from their parents to become the slaves of fellow Jews.

6. *I was very angry.* It seems that the letter of the law had not been violated, except in the matter of taking interest (v. 11), of which the people had not complained. That men might sell their daughters is apparent from Ex. 21:7. The servitude of menservants was limited to six years (see on Ex. 2:2), and if the year of jubilee began earlier than the end of the sixth year, they went free automatically (Lev. 25:10; see on Deut. 15:12). It was also permissible to “sell” (lease) land (Lev. 25:14–16), but not to dispose of it permanently (vs. 10, 13). However, the spirit if not the letter of the law was transgressed by the rich. In time of economic hardship it was their duty to assist their poorer brethren, not to oppress them (vs. 14, 17). Nehemiah, his near relatives, and his followers had done so to the extent of their ability (Neh. 5:10, 15). The rich, however, had made all the profit they could at the expense of their fellow countrymen. That Nehemiah, a man capable of great passion when his sense of right was aroused, could well be angry with these conscienceless and unscrupulous profiteers is easily understandable.

7. *Ye exact usury.* This was a violation of the law which forbade the taking of interest from Hebrews, but permitted taking it from foreigners (Deut. 23:19, 20; see on Ex. 22:25; Lev. 25:35).

I set a great assembly. The rebuke of Nehemiah apparently had no effect. The nobles gave no assurance that they would change their conduct. He was therefore compelled to bring the matter before the people, not that legal power resided with them, but that the nobles might be ashamed or afraid to continue their oppression once it was openly denounced by the chief civil ruler.

8. *We after our ability.* The “we” may refer either to those who returned more recently in contrast to those who had returned earlier, or to Nehemiah and his relatives in contrast to the rich oppressors. The latter is probably intended. Nehemiah’s words imply that he and similarly minded men had purchased Jews held in servitude by foreigners, and had set them free. This he had done as his means permitted.

9. *Also I said.* Nehemiah rightly felt that it was not enough to silence the nobles, or to cause them to feel ashamed. It was necessary to persuade them to change their actions.

10. *Might exact of them.* Literally, “are lending them.” The law required the rich to lend to the poor (Deut. 15:7–11) without usury (see on Ex. 22:25). Nehemiah had complied with both of these provisions, and now called upon others to do likewise. To lend was a virtue; to exact usury was a vice by which the rich took advantage of the poor (see on Neh. 5:11).

11. *Restore.* Having denounced oppression and stated the principle involved, Nehemiah made a strong appeal for action. He called upon those holding the lands of their poorer brethren as security to restore these to their owners without delay (see PK 650).

The hundredth. The hundredth taken as interest is probably, like the *centesima* of the Romans in the time of Cicero, to be understood as a monthly payment. One per cent per month was not a high rate of interest, compared with that usually paid in the ancient Orient. In Babylonia and Assyria the usual rate was 20–25 per cent for silver and 33 1/3 per cent for grain. Texts of the 7th century B.C. from Gozan (*Tell Halâf*), in Mesopotamia, reveal an annual rate of interest of 50 per cent for silver and 100 per cent for grain in that locality. In Egypt, it was 12–24 per cent during the Ptolemaic period (last three centuries B.C.), from which alone we have records of this kind. Nevertheless, the poor of Judea must have groaned under the load of interest, even if a 12 per cent annual

interest in Judea cannot be called exorbitant when compared with the rates in other countries.

12. *We will restore.* Nehemiah's eloquent appeal, his reaffirmation of the principles of the Mosaic law, and his own worthy example carried the day. The nobles, one and all, agreed not only to remit interest already charged, to refrain from exacting further interest, and to lend to their poorer brethren in harmony with the law, but to restore the forfeited lands and houses, which must have been of considerable value, and which according to the letter of the law they were entitled to keep until the year of jubilee.

Took an oath. See on Ezra 10:5. When the required consent had been given, Nehemiah called the priests, and required the creditors to swear to adhere conscientiously to their agreement. Nehemiah secured the attendance of the priests, partly for the purpose of giving solemnity to the oath now taken, as being taken before the Lord, and partly to give the declaration legal validity for judicial action, should that prove necessary.

13. *I shook my lap.* The Hebrew word translated "lap" designates the lap of the garment, in which things were sometimes carried. The word is found only here, and as "arms" in Isa. 49:22. To emphasize the binding nature of the promise, Nehemiah performed a symbolical act. This consisted in his gathering up his garment as if for the purpose of carrying something in it, and then shaking it out—as he uttered the curse of v. 13. Among the nations of antiquity few things were so much dreaded as falling under a curse. The maledictions of Deut. 28:16–44 were similarly designed to impress those who might be tempted to violate the law. Curses inscribed over the entrances to the tombs of Assyrian and Persian kings were intended to frighten away would-be looters. Ancient treaties were similarly protected against violation. Nehemiah's curse is unusual, but its purpose is clear.

14. *I was appointed.* Here for the first time Nehemiah clearly states that his authorization to return and rebuild the wall of Jerusalem was accompanied by appointment to the governorship of the province of Judea. It is possible that the appointment took place soon thereafter. His 12 years of governorship did not begin earlier than Nisan in the 20th year of Artaxerxes (ch. 2:1), that is, not before April 2, 444 B.C. It ended in the 32d regnal year of Artaxerxes, which according to Nehemiah's calendar year (see p. 109) probably began Sept. 25, 433, and ended Oct. 13, 432 B.C. During this year he was recalled to Artaxerxes' court (ch. 13:6), and it was probably at this time that the account of ch. 5:14–19 was written, perhaps also vs. 1–13, and possibly other parts of the book.

The bread of the governor. During all his term of office he had not claimed the usual revenue a governor was entitled to receive from his subjects; he had paid his own personal expenses. By his "brethren" Nehemiah here refers to his entire court as well as his own family.

15. *The former governors.* Of these, only one, Zerubbabel, is known. It is not certain that Ezra had been appointed as governor or whether he served in the capacity of a special commissioner. Nehemiah probably refers to the several governors who had apparently ruled over Judea during the 50 or 60 years between Zerubbabel and the arrival of Ezra.

Were chargeable. The words of the original are stronger and should be rendered "had oppressed" or "had been heavy" upon the people. The RSV reads "laid heavy burdens" on the people.

Beside. Literally, “after.” The Vulgate reads “daily.” Most commentators follow this interpretation, and conclude that Nehemiah’s court expenses were 40 shekels a day (334.8 g., or 10.8 oz. troy, if light shekels), and not that 40 shekels a year had been exacted from each person.

Servants bare rule. The domestic servants and lower officials of an Oriental court usually took advantage of their position to exact high fees from those who came seeking official favor. This was especially so in ancient times, where eunuchs and other retainers were often fearful tyrants. Haman under Xerxes, Sejanus under Tiberius, and Narcissus under Claudius are classic examples of this practice.

16. I continued. Not only did Nehemiah refrain from oppressing the people; he lived at his own expense, and beyond that he and his personal servants (also supported at his own expense) labored tirelessly on the wall. The manner in which Nehemiah and his servants labored is set forth in ch. 4:10, 13, 15, 17.

Neither bought we any land. Nehemiah either means that he had not taken land for debt, as the nobles had (vs. 3, 11), or that he had acquired no property in any way during his governorship. Personally he was not richer, but poorer, as the result of 12 years in office. It meant personal sacrifice to him to bear these responsibilities.

17. Moreover. This was not all. Nehemiah not only had taken care of all his own expenses, but had shown the hospitality people expected of a governor, and had fed daily the 150 family heads of the people living in Jerusalem (see ch. 11:1). Besides these regular guests, Nehemiah also entertained at his table Jews who came to Jerusalem on business from the towns of Judea and from surrounding nations. Nehemiah must have been a man of considerable means in order to live in Jerusalem for 12 years in the manner here described. That some of the Jews living in Babylonia had become very wealthy is attested by the business documents of “Murashu Sons,” excavated at Nippur (see p. 65).

18. Fowls. Although chickens are never clearly mentioned in the OT, their existence in Palestine at this time is attested by the Jaazaniah seal found at *Tell en-Naşbeh* in 1932, which shows a picture of a fighting cock. The earliest reference to chickens in Egypt dates from the time of Thutmose III in the 15th century, when they were introduced to the Nile country from Syria. Doves and geese may also have been included in the collective term “fowls.”

Bread of the governor. See on v. 14.

19. Think upon me, my God. Nehemiah closes with a prayer characteristically his own (see chs. 6:14; 13:22, 31).

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1–19PK 646–652

1–4PK 646–647

5–7PK 648

8 PK 649

9–13PK 650

CHAPTER 6

1 *Sanballat practiseth by craft, by rumours, by hired prophecies, to terrify Nehemiah.* 15 *The work is finished to the terror of the enemies.* 17 *Secret intelligence passeth between the enemies and the nobles of Judah.*

The Province of Judah in Nehemiah’s Time



Difference of opinion exists as to the location of the southern boundary of the Persian province of Judah. That indicated on this map represents the opinion of one school of thought. The boundary as given on *Settlements of the Persian Province of Judah* According to Ezra and Nehemiah is based on data provided by the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, as cited by that map.

³

1. Sanballat. Concerning the three leaders of the conspiracy, see on ch. 2:10, 19.

I had not set up. This may appear to contradict ch. 3:1, 3, 6, 13, etc. But the account of ch. 3 outlines the entire reconstruction project, with the object of indicating who were responsible for the various sections, not the time when the work was completed. Chronologically, chs. 4–6 are, in the main, parallel to ch. 3, and relate events that occurred while the wall was in process of being built. The hanging of the gates was, of course, the last thing to be done.

Upon the gates. Literally, “in the gates.”

²Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ne 4:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

³Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ge 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

2. Sanballat and Geshem. Tobiah is not mentioned. It is possible that only two of the enemies of Nehemiah were willing to go so far as to indulge in personal violence. It may be that Tobiah had reasons for declining to be a party to the plot, since he was related to some Jewish leaders.

Ono. Now *Kefr 'Anā*, about 7 mi. southeast of Jaffa. With the cities of Lod (Lydda) and Hadid, it formed a Jewish district virtually surrounded by Samaritan and Philistine areas. This Jewish district was chosen as the proposed meeting place, thus to mislead Nehemiah by giving him a false sense of security. It would be easy for them to attack him on the road as he crossed Samaritan territory in order to reach Ono.

Do me mischief. The character of the harm intended cannot be determined from the very general Hebrew word translated “mischief,” but it is difficult to conceive of any other purpose than personal violence.

3. I cannot come. Nehemiah replies cordially to the invitation of neighboring fellow governors, but his reply gives them no reason to hope that he will weaken. He does not even deign to disclose his suspicions, possibly his definite knowledge, of their evil plans.

5. An open letter. Why Sanballat changed from oral messages to a written document is not made clear. A written message may have appeared more official, and thus presumably more effective. The letter was probably written on a sheet of papyrus, a writing material commonly in use at that time in Palestine. Such a letter was ordinarily rolled up and the two ends of the roll folded back toward the middle. A string was then tied around the roll and a clay seal affixed to the knot so that it could not be opened without breaking the seal. The outside usually bore the address. To send an open letter accusing an officer of the Persian crown not only violated the laws of courtesy but was highly offensive. An “open letter” invited all to read its contents, and the object in sending it unsealed must have been to create alarm among the Jews and to incite them against Nehemiah. Compare the conduct of Sennacherib’s ambassadors (2 Kings 18:27–36).

6. Gashmu. Another form of the name Geshem (see on ch. 2:19). Sanballat apparently means to say that the supposed rumor about Nehemiah’s planned rebellion now circulating in the surrounding nations had come to Geshem’s notice, and he in turn had transmitted it to Sanballat. Sanballat, posing as a friend, is anxious to warn Nehemiah of the grave charge made against him. In some respects this charge is similar to the report the Jews threatened to make to Caesar regarding Pilate (John 19:12, 13).

7. Appointed prophets. Sanballat has little esteem for the high calling of a prophet. He had found so-called prophets ready to cooperate with him against Nehemiah, for pay (see vs. 12, 14), and he apparently thought of all prophets as being mercenary like his own (see Amos 7:12). Possibly also Sanballat had had access to prophecies such as those of Zechariah, and either misunderstood or purposely misconstrued them (see Zech. 1:16; 2:5; 6:11; 9:9, 10; 12:9; 14:9; etc.).

Take counsel together. By sending heavy accusations against him in an “open letter,” that is, one that might be read by everyone, Sanballat thought Nehemiah would seek to clear himself from suspicion by joining in the proposed interview.

9. Now therefore, O God. The words “O God” are not in the Hebrew, but seem to be correctly supplied by the translators. These words are part of a prayer.

10. Shemaiah. Nothing further is known of this prophet Shemaiah. At least five other men by this name are mentioned as living in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, but none of the others can be identified with this Shemaiah, the son of Delaiah.

Who was shut up. This phrase cannot mean that Nehemiah visited Shemaiah in his house because the latter could not come to him, on account of being either ceremonially unclean or restrained by the hand of the Lord or otherwise. That such an interpretation is incorrect is apparent from Shemaiah's proposal to Nehemiah to accompany him to the house of God. It follows, therefore, that Shemaiah had shut himself in his house, as if to intimate to Nehemiah that he felt his own life in danger. He sought thus to induce Nehemiah to agree to his proposal that they should both escape the snares laid for them by fleeing to the Temple. It is also possible that Shemaiah intended his self-imposed imprisonment as a symbolic act designed to reinforce his supposed message from God (see Eze. 4:1–10; Eze. 12:3–9; etc.). Both views are possible.

Within the temple. As distinguished from the "house of God," "temple" means the sanctuary, and not simply a room in some building within the Temple area. Of course, no layman was allowed to enter the Temple (see Ex. 29:33), and Nehemiah would have aroused the displeasure of God and the priests had he followed the advice. Doors separated the holy place from the porch of the Temple of Solomon (1 Kings 6:33, 34), and this was no doubt the case with the restored Temple also. Shemaiah suggested the shutting of these doors for greater security.

11. To save his life. Literally, "and live" (RSV). Nehemiah probably had in mind the command of Num. 18:7, that "the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death." The very fact that Shemaiah proposed a course of action contrary to the revealed will of God was sufficient evidence that he was a false prophet (see Gen. 3:1–5; Matt. 4:3–10).

12. I perceived. Nehemiah was not aware of Shemaiah's motive in sending the invitation to visit him at his home. However, the nature of the message revealed Shemaiah to be a false prophet, and Nehemiah recognized him now as an impostor. Compare the experience of the "old prophet" of 1 Kings 13:11–19.

Had hired him. That Tobiah is here mentioned before Sanballat instead of after him (chs. 2:10, 19; 4:7; 6:1) may imply that this particular scheme had been arranged by Tobiah, with the support of Sanballat. At other times Sanballat had been the more aggressive foe.

13. An evil report. For Nehemiah to enter and secrete himself within the holy place would have been a grave desecration of the house of God. It would have given his enemies occasion to cast suspicion upon him as one who lightly esteemed God's commands. Thus his standing in the eyes of the people would be undermined (see on v. 11). The least indication of fear on Nehemiah's part at this critical time would have been fatal to the morale of the people. The influence of Nehemiah depended on his character. One false step, and he would have been lost, his influence would have been gone, and the work on which his heart was set would have come to nought.

14. Noadiah. This prophetess is not mentioned elsewhere. By mentioning her along with other unnamed prophets and Shemaiah (vs. 11–13), Nehemiah implies that the incident related in vs. 10–13 is but one of several of the kind, and that false prophets were again busy among the people as in the period preceding the captivity, seeking to seduce them and their leaders from listening to the voice of the true prophets. For the work of

false prophets in the pre-exilic period see Isa. 9:15; 28:7; Jer. 27:9, 10; 28:9, 15–17; 29:24–32; Eze. 13:2, 17; Micah 3:5–11.

15. The wall was finished. Though the year is not mentioned here, the 20th year of Artaxerxes is clearly intended (see on ch. 2:1). This agrees with the other chronological statements of this book. In Nisan (the 1st month) Nehemiah had received permission from the king to go to Jerusalem. According to chs. 5:14 and 13:6 he was governor in Jerusalem from the 20th year onward and must therefore have set out for that place immediately after receiving royal authorization for his plans. If so, he arrived in Jerusalem during the fourth month. After three days he surveyed the wall, and soon thereafter called a public assembly to present his plan for rebuilding the wall and to enlist their cooperation (ch. 2:11–17). All this may have taken place in the course of the fourth month, so that the beginning of the work could actually have taken place either before the end of the 4th month or in the beginning of the 5th. It is not clear from Nehemiah's words how he computed the 52 days during which the wall was in process of reconstruction. He could have reckoned the period from the day of resuming the work until it was finished, including the weekly Sabbaths, so that the number of working days would be only 44 or 45; or he could have meant that there were 52 working days. Thus the period of activity would cover about 60 days. In the first case the beginning of the work would have fallen in the early days of Ab (the 5th month), in the latter case in the last part of Tammuz (the 4th month). According to the Jewish calendar followed by Nehemiah, Elul 25 in the 20th year of Artaxerxes was approximately September 21, 444 B.C.

Some commentators have contended that 52 days do not provide enough time to rebuild the wall. They have preferred to accept the two years and four months given by Josephus (*Antiquities* xi. 5. 8) as a more reasonable length of time. However, there is no need to reject the Bible figure in favor of Josephus because: (1) Nehemiah's work was not a complete rebuilding of the wall, but in many parts only repair work (see on ch. 1:3); (2) it was carried out in great haste in the face of threatened attack; and (3) the completion of the wall in such a short time was so incredible to the enemies of the Jews that they considered it a miracle (ch. 6:16).

16. Our enemies. Sanballat and the Samaritans, Tobiah and the Ammonites, Geshem and the Arabians, and the Ashdodites (see ch. 4:7) are the special "enemies" here meant. The "heathen that were about" the Jews were other nations living in Palestine, Transjordan and Syria. Even some of these were unfriendly and disliked any advancement of Jewish power and prosperity. The hatred against the Jews that existed in certain circles during the time of Xerxes, as indicated by the events described in the book of Esther, was still alive, and, as history reveals, has never died.

17. Many letters. Further light is here thrown on the desperate attempts of Tobiah to overthrow Nehemiah and bring his labors to a halt, and on the disloyalty of certain men of the nobility, already hinted at in ch. 3:5. A vigorous correspondence was carried on between Tobiah and those high in Jewish affairs, with the object of frightening Nehemiah (v. 19). Such correspondence could not remain unknown to Nehemiah, for the majority were loyal to him. Furthermore, it may be that no attempt was made to keep it secret.

18. Many in Judah. Through marriage connections with two Jewish families, Tobiah had made many among the nobility his "sworn" friends, who used their influence to carry out his policies.

Shechaniah. Tobiah's father-in-law, Shechaniah the son of Arah, was a respectable Jew of the family of Arah, mentioned in Ezra 2:5. Although the name Shechaniah was common at this period of Jewish history, this particular person seems otherwise not to be mentioned in the book of Nehemiah. Meshullam, who had become father-in-law of Tobiah's daughter, appears among those who shared in the work of rebuilding the wall (ch. 3:4, 30). According to ch. 13:4, Tobiah was also related to the high priest Eliashib, but it is possible that this relationship was not formed until after Nehemiah's first governorship. The fact that both Tobiah and his son Johanan have genuine Jewish names, with the abbreviated form of *Yahweh* as part of each name, leads to the conclusion that they were descendants of Israelites of the old northern kingdom, the ten tribes, and had joined the Ammonites (see on ch. 2:10).

19. They reported. The Hebrew text has a play on Tobiah's name, which means "Goodness of Yahweh," with the reporting of "good" deeds to Nehemiah by Jewish friends. The sarcasm is evident. The purpose of all this was to make Nehemiah think well of Tobiah. These efforts were therefore in line with those of the false prophet Shemaiah (vs. 10–13), their purpose being to confuse Nehemiah with advice that appeared to be friendly.

Letters. Probably similar in content to that of Sanballat (vs. 5, 6).

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1–19PK 653–660

1–3PK 653

3 Ev 691; PK 659; 1T 123; 3T 38, 570; 5T 616

3–53T 574

4–8PK 654

10 PK 655

11 PK 656

12 PK 655

13 PK 656

15–18PK 657

19 PK 658

CHAPTER 7

1 *Nehemiah committeth the charge of Jerusalem to Hanani and Hananiah. 5 A register of the genealogy of them which came at the first out of Babylon, 9 of the people, 39 of the priests, 43 of the Levites, 46 of the Nethinims, 57 of Solomon's servants, 63 and of the priests which could not find their pedigree. 66 The whole number of them, with their substance. 70 Their oblations.*

1. The porters. According to ancient custom it was the duty of the doorkeepers to keep watch over the house of God, and to open and close the gates of the Temple courts (1 Chron. 9:17–19; 26:12–19).

The singers. Ordinarily the singers and the Levites appointed to assist the priests were not expected to do guard duty for the Temple. Under the present extraordinary circumstance Nehemiah assigned to these two groups the additional task of keeping watch over the walls and gates of the city.

2. My brother Hanani. See on ch. 1:2. It was in keeping with Oriental practice that Nehemiah appointed Hanani to be one of the two mayors of the city of Jerusalem. His

loyalty to Nehemiah was certain. Rephaiah and Shallum were in charge of the outlying districts and suburbs of Jerusalem (ch. 3:9, 12).

Hananiah. The name Hananiah recurs frequently (Ezra 10:28; Neh. 3:8; 10:23; 12:12, 41), but whether one or several persons are indicated is difficult to say. This Hananiah, however, seems to have been a different person from those mentioned elsewhere. Nehemiah gave him a position of trust on account of his character, as being a faithful man and God-fearing “above many.”

Ruler of the palace. Probably the Temple fortress (see on ch. 2:8).

3. Until the sun be hot. The gates of towns were usually opened at sunrise, but during this critical period extra precautions were needed. Hence the gates were not to be opened until later in the morning when all the guards would be at their posts.

Shut the doors. The time for shutting the doors is not given. The explanatory phrase “while they stand” probably means that the doors were to be shut and bolted before the guards went off duty.

Appoint watches. The meaning of the last part of v. 3 is that during the night, when the gates were closed, the inhabitants of Jerusalem were to be alert and available for defense against attack.

Every one in his watch. This phrase implies a regular military type of organization. The guards were divided into watches, being on duty a certain number of hours each day and during the night.

4. Houses were not builded. This does not mean that there were no houses at all, for the city had now been inhabited again for 90 years. It means that in proportion to the size of the city, comparatively few houses had been rebuilt and that there was still much unoccupied space on which houses were yet to be built. When Nehemiah came to Jerusalem he found the Temple restored, but the greater part of the city still in ruins. The new state was basically agricultural, and had functioned without a real capital. Now the city had walls and was safe as a residence and suitable for a capital. The problem confronting Nehemiah was one of inducing people to live in the city and to see that they had shelter.

5. Put into mine heart. Contemplating the vast empty spaces within the city walls, Nehemiah considered what he should do to remedy the situation. He was impressed to take a census of the people, which would provide information on the relative populations of city and country. From this it could also be determined which towns and districts could best afford to contribute to the resettlement of Jerusalem. Such a census, according to ordinary Jewish usage, was by families (see Num. 1:17–47; 1 Chron. 21:5, 6).

I found a register. That is, of the exiles who came from Babylon under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua (Ezra 2). Nehemiah included a copy of this register in his memoirs, in this way preserving two copies—one in Ezra 2:1–70 and the other in Neh. 7:6–73.

The two lists are almost identical but show minor differences (see on Ezra 2:2). For comments on the names in Nehemiah’s list, see on these names in Ezra 2:1–70. Only the more important variations will be considered here.

7. Nahamani. To the eleven names given in Ezra 2:2 that of Nahamani is here added. There are also slight differences in the spelling of the names—Azariah for Seraiah, Raamiah for Reelaiah, Mispereth for Mizpar, etc. Most commentators account for the variations by assuming scribal errors. But these differences may as well be explained on

the basis that one list was made in Babylon before the caravan set out for Judea, while the other is a copy of a revised list made at a later time in Palestine.

25. *Gibeon*. For Gibeon, Ezra 2:20 has Gibbar, a name otherwise unknown. Gibbar may be a variant form of the name Gibeon, or a scribal error. But Gibeon is considered preferable.

43. *Of Jeshua*. The parallel text of Ezra 2:40 seems to offer a better reading for Neh. 7:43 (see also Ezra 3:9). The passage here should probably read “Jeshua and Kadmiel of the children of Hodevah.” This ancestor of Jeshua and Kadmiel appears under the three forms of Hodevah, Hodaviah (Ezra 2:40), and Judah (Ezra 3:9).

70. *The Tirshatha gave*. The governor gave (see on Ezra 2:63). This is additional to the information contained in Ezra 2:68, 69. In the former list Zerubbabel’s offering is not listed separately from that of the other heads of families. The account in Nehemiah’s list is more detailed and perhaps more exact than that given in the other copy.

CHAPTER 8

1 *The religious manner of reading and hearing the law.* 9 *They comfort the people.* 13 *The forwardness of them to hear and be instructed.* 16 *They keep the feast of tabernacles.*

1. *All the people gathered*. The introduction to the narrative of ch. 8 is identical with that of Ezra 3 (Neh. 7:73 to 8:1; cf. Ezra 3:1). The same matter, the assembling of the people on the approach of the seventh month, is described in the same words. But the object of this assembling of the people was different from that mentioned in Ezra 3. In Ezra, they met to restore the altar of burnt offering and the sacrificial worship; now they gather for the purpose of celebrating the great feasts of the 7th month and for religious instruction. It does not seem that the people were summoned for this gathering, but habitually arrived at the Temple at that time. It is therefore likely that Ezra had instituted such meetings after his return from Babylon 13 years earlier, and that it had become a habit in Judea to gather in Jerusalem at the beginning of the civil year (see Vol. II, p. 110) for instruction and for the celebration of the three great feasts of that month: the Blowing of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:24–43; see on Ex. 23:14; Deut. 6:16).

***The water gate*.** For see on ch. 3:26.

***They spake*.** It is remarkable that the people came asking for instruction. Though many of them were negligent in observing the law, they nevertheless felt a desire to hear it read. Not content with existing conditions, they desired to reach a higher level in their spiritual experience and were convinced that the hearing of God’s Word would benefit them.

***Ezra the scribe*.** See on Ezra 7:6.

***The book of the law*.** The people were acquainted with the Pentateuch, here referred to, and knew that Ezra was versed in it.

2. *The first day*. The New Year’s Day of the civil calendar (see Vol. II p. 110). This first day of the 7th month was distinguished above the other new moons of the year as the Feast of Trumpets, and celebrated as a high festival by a solemn assembly and cessation from labor (Lev. 23:23–25; Num. 29:1–6).

3. *From the morning until midday*. The instruction lasted five or six hours. That it did not consist of incessant reading is apparent from vs. 4–8, which explain that the reading went on alternately with explanatory interpretations of the law by the Levites.

4. A pulpit of wood. Compare the word “pillar” in 2 Kings 11:14 and 23:3, where, however, the term used is ‘*ammud*, “stand.” Here, the Heb. *migdal*, generally meaning “tower,” is used. It must have been a high scaffold, if the term “tower” could be used to describe it; hence the translation “pulpit” is warranted, with the understanding that it was a high “pulpit,” so that all the people could easily see and hear Ezra and his companions.

Beside him stood. Six persons, probably priests, stood on Ezra’s right, and seven on his left. In the Apocryphal book of 1 Esdras seven are mentioned as standing on his right hand also, the name Azarias being inserted between Anaiah and Urijah. Urijah is perhaps the father of the Meremoth of ch. 3:4, 21; Maaseiah, the father of the Azariah of ch. 3:23; Pedaiah, the individual named in ch. 3:25; the Azariah to be inserted, if we accept the record in 1 Esdras, may be the same as the one named in ch. 3:23; while a Meshullam occurs in ch. 3:4, 6; and a Malchiah in ch. 3:11, 14, 31.

5. All the people stood up. In public assemblies the Jews commonly sat to listen, though they occasionally remained standing and stood for prayer. It is not to be supposed that they stood during the whole of the six hours of reading and instruction. Rabbinical tradition claims that from the days of Moses it had been a custom with the Israelites to stand at the reading of the law.

6. Ezra blessed the Lord. Ezra’s blessing may have begun with a sentence of thanksgiving, like that of David (1 Chron. 29:10), but scarcely with an entire psalm, as in 1 Chron. 16:8–36.

Amen, Amen. Repetition marks intensity of feeling (see 2 Kings 11:14; Luke 23:21).

Lifting up their hands. For the Jewish custom of uplifting the hands in prayer see Ps. 134:2; 1 Tim. 2:8; etc.

Faces to the ground. Compare 2 Chron. 7:3.

7. And the Levites. Since all the men named in this verse are Levites (on some of them, see ch. 9:4, 5), either this phrase means “and the rest of the Levites,” or the Hebrew *we*, “and,” must be translated “even,” or “namely.”

The people stood. Literally, “upon the people’s standing.” It is unlikely that they stood during all the six hours of reading and instruction. The meaning is that the people remained in their places, and did not disperse. Everyone was deeply interested and hungry for spiritual food.

8. Distinctly. Heb. *mephorash*, “be explained,” from the root *parash*, “to separate,” “to specify” (see on Ezra 4:18). Although *parash* appears several times in the OT, its precise meaning is not always certain. While the translation “clearly” or “distinctly” is possible, many scholars favor rendering it “with interpretation” (RSV margin), thus emphasizing the idea of making the meaning clear to the mind, rather than merely the sound clear to the ear. Obviously the former would include the latter, for the audience must hear distinctly before it can understand the meaning. Others suggest, “in sections,” meaning that portions of the law were alternately read and explained. Some have thought that this custom of reading a short passage of Scripture in Hebrew and explaining it in Aramaic came into use after the Exile, when Aramaic began to replace Hebrew (see Neh. 13:24) as the common language of the people (see Vol. I, pp. 29, 30; see on Luke 4:16).

Gave the sense. This has been interpreted to mean that the Levites translated the Hebrew words into the popular Aramaic.

According to vs. 5–8 only the Levites appear to have read from the book of the law, and to have explained what they read. Ezra, it seems, did nothing more than open the book (v. 5) and preside at the assembly. However, vs. 2, 3 declare that Ezra himself read to the assembled people. It therefore appears that vs. 4–8 are a more detailed description of what is related in vs. 2, 3. Ezra may have been the first reader, while the Levites later joined him in reading the law and expounding it. The only doubtful point is whether the 13 Levites interpreted the law in succession, or simultaneously to different groups of people. The latter view is probably correct.

9. *The Tirshatha.* The governor (see on Ezra 2:63).

Mourn not. The portion read must have deeply impressed the assembled throng. The portions of Scripture read consisted of certain sections of Deuteronomy, together with other parts of the Torah, selected to convict the people of their sin in transgressing the commands of the Lord, and to remind them of the punishments to which they thus exposed themselves. They were so moved that they mourned and wept. This induced Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites to encourage and comfort them.

10. *Send portions.* Compare Esther 9:19, 22. How appropriate it is that those who have should share with those who have little or nothing, particularly on festive occasions, in order that all may rejoice together (see Deut. 16:14).

The joy of the Lord. The common opinion that the Jewish religion was gloomy and austere is erroneous. Its ritual and ceremonial regulations were indeed detailed, and certainly solemn, but there was much of joy in the services. Religious ritual requirements included sacrifices of thanksgiving, of which the larger portion was eaten by the offerer and his friends in a festal meal (Deut. 27:6, 7). The Sabbath day, as originally planned, was far from the gloomy occasion some have conceived. Rather it was a day of spiritual delight, joy, and gladness (Isa. 58:14). Of the other seasons set apart for special religious observances, on only one were the people to “afflict” their souls (Lev. 23:27). The others were festivals for the commemoration of God’s goodness and for the offering of praise to Him.

13. *The second day.* Having devoted the first half of New Year’s Day—the opening day of the civil year—to listening to instruction from the book of the law, and the second half to joyous festivities, the people apparently returned to their respective homes. The heads of the families and cities, however, assembled with the priests and other ecclesiastical workers the following day for instructions pertaining to further activities of the seventh month of the ecclesiastical calendar (see Vol. II, pp. 109, 110).

14. *Written in the law.* The law concerning the Feast of Tabernacles is found in Lev. 23:39–43. In Deut. 16:13, 14 the people were commanded to keep the feast with gladness. The custom of dwelling in booths is based on Lev. 23:43. This practice had evidently fallen into disuse, first during the captivity, and again after its temporary revival by Zerubbabel (Ezra 3:4).

15. *Go forth unto the mount.* The extant text appears to imply that this statement and what follows were quoted from Scripture, but this is not the case. This difficulty is avoided by the LXX, which reads, “and Ezra said,” instead of “saying” between “Jerusalem” and “Go forth.”

Pine. Heb. ‘eš *shemen*, literally, “oil tree,” generally rendered “wild olive” in translating this text. However, it is questionable that the wild olive tree, or oleaster, which contains little or no oil, would have received such a name. Therefore the suggestion has

been made that a resinous tree is meant, perhaps the fir tree. According to 1 Kings 6:23, 31, 32 its wood was used as timber, whereas wild olive wood is of little value for the purpose here described.

Palm branches. That is, of the date palm.

Thick trees. The same expression is used in Lev. 23:40, but in both references the meaning is uncertain. Perhaps trees with a thick foliage are intended. It is remarkable that two of the trees commanded in Lev. 23 are omitted here, while three—the olive, fir, and myrtle—are added.

16. The roof. The flat roofs of Oriental houses and the courts round which they were commonly built furnished convenient sites for the booths, and could be used by the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Visitors from the country (see v. 15) occupied the open spaces in the city and the Temple courts, where many could be accommodated.

Water gate. See v. 1 and on ch. 3:26.

The gate of Ephraim. This gate lay between the Broad Wall and the so-called Old Gate, according to ch. 12:38, 39, and must therefore have been in the western wall. That it is not mentioned in the list of ch. 3 may be due either to a gap in the list somewhere in ch. 3:6–8 or to the fact that this particular gate had been completed prior to Nehemiah's arrival. If it had not been burned by enemies attacking the city (see Neh. 1:3), it would not be in need of repair.

17. Jeshua. Jeshua is a contraction of Jehoshua, usually rendered Joshua in the modern translations (Ex. 17:9; etc.). The Greek form of this name was Jesus (see Acts 7:45; Heb. 4:8; see on Matt. 1:1).

Had not the children of Israel done so. This does not imply that the Israelites had not celebrated the festival since the days of Jeshua, at the invasion of Canaan, for, according to Ezra 3:4, those who returned from captivity at that time kept it in the first year of their return. A similar celebration is also mentioned in connection with the dedication of Solomon's Temple (2 Chron. 7:10; 1 Kings 8:65). Hence, the text must mean that since the days of Joshua there had been no general celebration of this festival as now (see on v. 14).

18. He read. "He" must refer to Ezra, although he has not been mentioned since v. 13. The systematic, day-by-day reading of the law may imply that this was a sabbatical year, and that the rehearsal commanded in Deut. 31:10–13 took place.

They kept the feast. See Lev. 23:34; Num. 29:12–34; Deut. 16:13.

The eighth day. This solemnizing of the eighth day was commanded in Lev. 23:36 and Num. 29:35.

According unto the manner. It is possible that a regularly established custom is referred to, one indication of many that the feast had been observed continuously.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1–18DA 216; PK 661–665

2 PK 661

3 PK 662

4, 6 PK 661

7–10PK 662

8 COL 335

9, 10 MH 281

10 GC 477

12 PK 662
13–18PK 665
15–17MH 282

CHAPTER 9

1 *A solemn fast, and repentance of the people.* 4 *The Levites make a religious confession of God's goodness, and their wickedness.*

1. The twenty and fourth day. The 24th of the 7th month (Tishri) in the 21st year of Artaxerxes I was October 19, 444 B.C. (According to the Jewish reckoning his 20th year had ended with the close of the 6th month, see pp. 101–103.)

Were assembled with fasting. It would seem to have been appropriate that the occasion described in chs. 9 and 10 should have taken place on the 10th of the month when they observed the great Day of Atonement (PK 665), the day of national humiliation and self-investigation. On that day, according to the law, every man was to search his own heart; whoever neglected to do so was to be cut off from Israel (Lev. 23:27–29). Certainly, under Ezra, the observance of the day would not be neglected. Whatever may have been the reason for postponing the event here described, the civil and ecclesiastical authorities appointed a day that had no traditional ritual of its own for the solemn act of penitence on which the heart of the nation was now set. The day chosen fell two days after the completion of the joyous Feast of Tabernacles, which closed on the 22d of the 7th month.

With sackclothes. On the use of sackcloth in mourning, see Gen. 37:34; 2 Sam. 3:31; 21:10; 1 Kings 21:27; etc. Putting earth or dust on the head was less common (1 Sam. 4:12; 2 Sam. 1:2; and Job 2:12).

2. Separated themselves. Compare ch. 10:28, from which it appears that the “strangers” were the heathen surrounding the state of Judah. This act represented a voluntary renunciation of all heathen customs and contacts (cf. 2 Cor. 6:14).

3. Stood up. That is, they remained in their places, and did not leave until the work of confession and penitence was complete. The Jews confessed their sins kneeling (Ezra 9:5), or prostrate (Ezra 10:1).

One fourth part. Anciently the Jews divided the day into four parts, each of about three hours' duration. A similar division of the night is frequently alluded to in the NT (Mark 6:48; 13:35; etc.).

4. The stairs. Literally, “ascent,” by which probably the scaffold, or “pulpit,” of Ezra 8:4 is meant.

The Levites. The repetition of the names of the Levites in v. 5 shows that the invitation to praise God is distinct from the crying to God with a loud voice of v. 4. It seems that the Levites first cried to God by addressing to Him their confessions and supplications, and having done so, called upon the congregation to worship Him. Eight names of Levites are given in both verses, and five of them—Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, and Sherebiah—are identical. That the three others are different should not be explained as scribal or editorial errors. There is a more simple explanation—the second group was composed, in part, of different Levites from the first group. Had they been the same both times, it would not have been necessary for the author to repeat their names again so soon.

5. The Levites. See on v. 4.

Thy glorious name. The high honor due to the “name” of God is taught by the authors of Holy Scripture, from Mt. Sinai (Ex. 20:7) to the Isle of Patmos (Rev. 15:4), from the Pentateuch to the book of Revelation. The “glorious name” is an expression which occurs a few times in the Bible, but the exact Hebrew words used here are found elsewhere only in Ps. 72:19.

6. *Thou, art Lord alone.* Compare Ps. 86:10 and Isa. 37:16. In the latter passage the phraseology is almost identical.

The heaven of heavens. Compare Deut. 10:14; 1 Kings 8:27; Ps. 148:4. The expression has been explained as a term either for the highest heaven (see 2 Cor. 12:2) or for the universe as a whole. The latter interpretation seems to suit best the various passages where this phrase occurs.

All their host. Some have taken this to mean the stars, but the last clause of the verse seems to point to the angels as the host of heaven.

Thou preservest them all. The preservation of all created things by the Creator of the universe was certainly believed by all sacred writers, but never so clearly stated as here. The psalmist says, “Thou preservest man and beast” (Ps. 36:6), but this acknowledgment falls far short of the universal scope of the present passage. The power to preserve is no less important than the power to create.

7. *Out of Ur of the Chaldees.* See on Gen. 11:31; see also Acts 7:2–4.

Abraham. See on Gen. 17:5.

8. *Madest a covenant.* An allusion to Gen. 15:18–21; 17:7, 8. For additional mention of the Canaanite nations, see Ex. 3:8; Deut. 7:1.

Righteous. God is called righteous, for His commands and His character agree (see Deut. 32:4).

10. *They dealt proudly.* The “proud dealing” of the Egyptians is spoken of in Ex. 18:11.

Get thee a name. That is, He became known through the signs and wonders that He wrought in Egypt (see Ex. 9:16; 14:17; 15:14–16; etc.).

11. *Divide the sea.* The description of this event is found in Ex. 14:21, 22, 28; 15:19.

As a stone. This phrase and the term “mighty waters,” are taken from the “song of Moses” (Ex. 15:5, 10).

12. *Thou leddest them.* On divine guidance en route to Canaan, by means of miraculous tokens of the divine presence, see Ex. 13:21 and Num. 14:14.

13. *Upon mount Sinai.* The revelation of God on Sinai and the proclamation of the law described in Ex. 19 and 20. Compare also Deut. 4:36. On the various designations for the “law” see Ps. 19:9; 119:39, 44, 62, 63, 66, 68, etc.

14. *Thy holy sabbath.* The words chosen here imply that the Sabbath had existed before the lawgiving, which agrees with Gen. 2:2, 3 and Exe. 16:23. That Nehemiah considered the Sabbath command one of extraordinary importance is seen from the fact that it is the only command of the Decalogue specifically mentioned. It is declared to have been bestowed as a benefit by God upon the Israelites, inasmuch as they were to share in the rest of God on that day.

15. *Bread from heaven.* The manna has already been called the “bread of heaven” (Ps. 105:40), or the “corn of heaven” (Ps. 78:24). Now for the first time it is called “bread from heaven”—a phrase familiar to Christians by its use in John 6:32, 51, 58. For the provision of manna and of water from the rock for the support of Israel during their

journey through the wilderness on the way to Canaan, see Ex. 16:4, 10–35; 17:6; Num. 20:8.

16. *They and our fathers.* The Heb. *we*, “and,” should here be rendered “even,” or “namely.” This verse alludes to the various rebellions, of which some are enumerated in succeeding verses.

17. *In their rebellion.* For the Hebrew word *bemiryam*, “in their rebellion,” seven Hebrew manuscripts read *bemisrayim*, “in Egypt,” with which the LXX also agrees. The whole passage then reads, “They appointed a captain to return to their bondage in Egypt.” The reference to the appointment of a captain is found in Num. 14:4.

A God ready to pardon. Literally, “a God of pardons.” The Hebrew word for “pardon” is rare, and occurs elsewhere only in Dan. 9:9 and Ps. 130:4. The remainder of the verse is parallel to Joel 2:13 and Jonah 4:2.

18. *A molten calf.* See Ex. 32:4.

Great provocations. A better translation would be “great blasphemies,” as the same word is rendered in Eze. 35:12.

20. *Thy good spirit.* The “good spirit” of God is mentioned also in Ps. 143:10, and the fact of God’s instructing and teaching men, in Ps. 32:8. Instruction by God’s Spirit is nowhere else distinctly mentioned in the OT, but is implied in Num. 11:17, 25, where God endowed the 70 elders with the Spirit of prophecy.

21. *They lacked nothing.* See Deut. 2:7; 8:4.

22. *Corners.* Heb. *pe’ah*, “corner,” may also be translated “side,” “fringe,” or “border.” Since the kingdoms of Og and Sihon here mentioned were border territories of Israel, *pe’ah* should be translated accordingly.

And the land. As in v. 16 the *we*, “and,” should be rendered “namely” or “even.”

23. *As the stars of heaven.* A reference to the promise made to Abraham (Gen. 15:5; 22:17). On the phenomenal increase of the children of Israel in Egypt, see Ex. 1:7, 12.

24. *The Canaanites.* Sometimes, as in v. 8, the “Canaanites” are spoken of as a single nation, along with other tribes. At other times, however, the term is used in a larger, inclusive sense for all the inhabitants of Canaan, of whatever tribe they might be. Here it is used in this wider sense.

25. *Strong cities.* Among the strong cities taken were Jericho (Joshua 6), Lachish (ch. 10:32), and Hazor (ch. 11:11), to mention only a few.

A fat land. Compare Num. 14:7, 8; Deut. 8:7–9; 2 Kings 18:32. On houses full of goods, see Deut. 6:11. The chief cultivated trees of Palestine were the olive, fig, apple, almond, walnut, mulberry, sycamore, and pomegranate. Date palms grew abundantly in the Jordan valley.

And became fat. Aside from this passage, the expression is used only in Deut. 32:15 and Jer. 5:28. A comparison of these texts shows that these words are never used in a flattering way but always in connection with reproof (see also Jer. 50:11; Eze. 34:20). Neh. 9:25 is no exception.

26. *Cast thy law.* See Eze. 23:35.

Slaw thy prophets. Compare Matt. 23:37 and Luke 11:47. Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, was put to death by Joash (2 Chron. 24:22), and many prophets were slain by Jezebel (1 Kings 18:4). Jewish tradition claims that Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel were murdered by fellow Jews, and others may have suffered a like fate.

27. *Thou gavest them saviours.* This and v. 28 refer to the time of the judges. In the Hebrew, Othniel and Ehud are called “saviours” (Judges 3:9, 15, “deliverer”); Shamgar, Gideon, Jephthah, David, and others were also liberators from foreign oppression. These men were raised up by God to save His people Israel from the heavy hand of their oppressors.

28. *After they had rest.* See Judges 3:11, 30; 5:31; 8:28; etc.

29. *Withdrew the shoulder.* The figure is of an ox shying from the yoke, and backing away when required to bear it. In Hosea 4:16 it is said that “Israel slideth back as a backsliding heifer” (see also Zech. 7:11). This and v. 30 apply to the time of the kings.

30. *Many years.* God was patient with the northern kingdom for more than two centuries, during which time 20 godless kings occupied the throne of Israel. He was equally forbearing with the southern kingdom, which He permitted to continue nearly 350 years. Many of Judah’s 20 kings grieved Him with their idolatry, and with crimes beyond measure.

Thy prophets. Compare 2 Kings 17:13, where almost the same words are used as in this passage (see also 2 Chron. 36:15, 16). There was almost a continuous succession of prophets from the time of Solomon to the Babylonian captivity, and beyond.

Besides prophets whose writings have come down to us and whose names are thus familiar to every reader of the Bible, there were such prophets as Ahijah the Shilonite, Iddo the seer, Shemaiah the prophet, Hanani, Jehu the son of Hanani, Elijah, Elisha, Micaiah the son of Imlah, Zechariah the son of Jehoiada, Huldah, and a number of nameless men of God who may also be classified as prophets. The Jews had ignored the exhortations constantly addressed to them by messengers of God.

Therefore God delivered His people into the hands of the heathen. This began with the invasion of the Assyrians, who eventually destroyed the kingdom of Israel, and culminated in the subjection of Judah by the Chaldeans. More recently the Samaritans and other surrounding nations had attacked the remnant of Israel.

31. *Nor forsake them.* In spite of these judgments, God, according to His promise (Jer. 4:27; 5:10, 18; 30:11; etc.), did not utterly forsake His people, nor make a full end of them. God’s merciful dealings with the transgressors was for the purpose of preserving a remnant through whom He might fulfill these promises.

32. *The terrible God.* Similar phraseology appears in Deut. 10:17 and Neh. 1:5. To those who reject His mercy God appears as Judge (see Rev. 6:14–17).

Who keepest covenant. This thought occurs also in Ps. 89:28 and Neh. 1:5.

The kings of Assyria. Shalmaneser III of Assyria—not mentioned in the Bible—records that he defeated Ahab, and forced Jehu to pay tribute to him and kneel before him. Tiglath-pileser III (called Pul in Babylonia) took tribute from Menahem (2 Kings 15:19, 20), and carried two and a half tribes into captivity (2 Kings 15:29; 1 Chron. 5:26). A third Assyrian king, Shalmaneser V, laid siege to Samaria (2 Kings 17:5–23) and most probably took it just before his death. A fourth, Senacherib, took all the fenced cities of Judah from Hezekiah and forced him to redeem Jerusalem by paying a great ransom (2 Kings 18:13–16). Another Assyrian king, either Esarhaddon or Ashurbanipal, took Manasseh as a prisoner to Babylon (2 Chron. 33:11). This was the last Assyrian expedition into Judah. The Lord, through Isaiah, called the Assyrian monarch “the rod of mine anger” (Isa. 10:5). For these contacts between Assyrian kings and the Hebrews, see Vol. II, pp. 159, 160.

33. *Thou art just.* Compare Deut. 32:4; Ezra 9:15; Neh. 9:8.

34. *Neither have our kings.* In the enumeration of the different classes of the people, the prophets are here omitted, because as God's witnesses they are not reckoned among those who had transgressed, though they shared in the sufferings that befell the nation.

35. *In their kingdom.* This refers to the time when Judah was an independent kingdom, not subject to a foreign power. But even when they were masters over their own land, the Jews rarely served the One who gave them their land; rather, they served the gods of the nations that later subjugated them.

36. *We are servants.* Since the children of Israel had refused to be servants of God, they were handed over to foreigners as slaves (see Jer. 5:19). For that matter, they still found themselves servants of a foreign power, the Persians, though God in His mercy had restored them a certain measure of independence and liberty. Compare 2 Chron. 12:8, where the service of God and "the service of the kingdoms of the countries" are contrasted.

37. *Yieldeth much increase.* That is, the Persian monarchs derived a large revenue from Judea. The amount paid by the small province of Judea is not known, but the satrapy "Beyond the River," to which Judea belonged, paid annually 350 talents of silver (Herodotus iii. 91), or about 11.6 (10.9 metric) tons if in light talents, plus a large contribution in kind.

Dominion over our bodies. The Persians exercised the right to draft their subjects into military service, to fight on land and sea. Jews had no doubt taken part in the expeditions of Darius and Xerxes against Greece, and many may have been killed in some of the disastrous defeats the Persian armies suffered there.

Over our cattle. This refers to the fact that the foreign rulers took what they wanted, and the nominal owners had to be content with what was left. Though a man possessed great herds he could never know how much benefit would accrue to him from them. Beasts of burden were probably commandeered for military service.

Great distress. Since the rulers appropriated Jewish property at will, the yield of both the soil and the herd, this distress probably included dire poverty. The term also included the anguish of soul of a liberty-loving people as they suffered galling servitude on the land which was theirs by divine gift. Yet there is no murmur against God. His hand is plainly seen in all the suffering, and their bitterness is only self-reproach.

38. *Seal unto it.* Ancient documents were usually sealed. When the records were written in cuneiform on soft clay tablets (see Vol. I, pp. 110, 134, 139), cylinder seals were rolled over the moist clay of the tablets before baking. A document written on papyrus (see p. 417; Vol. I, pp. 30, 31) was rolled and folded up. A string was bound around it and a lump of clay put over the knot; then either a stamp seal was pressed into the clay or a cylinder seal rolled over it. Sometimes each party to the contract stamped his seal upon a separate piece of sealing clay which he then attached to the document by means of a string. Any number of seals could be attached in this way.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

31-38DA 216

1, 2 PK 665

5, 6 PK 666

6 Ed 130; PP 115

13 PP 365

CHAPTER 10

1 *The names of them that sealed the covenant.* 29 *The points of the covenant.*

1. Tirshatha. The Persian title for “governor” (see on Ezra 2:63). Nehemiah, whose influence was no doubt behind the long address of the Levites recorded in the preceding chapter, may have been the spiritual father of the covenant now to be concluded. He set an example by being first to sign the document.

Zidkijah. Probably a high official. However, nothing further is known regarding him. It has been assumed that after the analogy of Ezra 4:9, 17 he was the secretary to the governor.

2. Seraiah. The 21 names following those of Nehemiah and his secretary are designated as “priests” (v. 8). Among these, the high priestly house of Seraiah had, appropriately, precedence. Of all the 21 names, 15 occur in ch. 12:2–7 as leading priests who came up with Jeshua and Zerubbabel from Babylon, and in ch. 12:12–21 as heads of priestly houses. Hence it is obvious these 21 men who signed the agreement did so as heads of their respective families and courses (see on Neh. 12; Luke 1:5).

9. The Levites. Jeshua, Binnui, and Kadmiel represent the three chief families of Levites who had returned with Zerubbabel (see Ezra 2:40; 3:9; Neh. 7:43; 9:4, 5; etc.). Here, Binnui seems to have supplanted Kadmiel and to have stepped into the second place. Of the remaining names, those of Hashabiah and Sherebiah represent families that returned with Ezra (Ezra 8:18, 19). The remaining names are probably also those of families.

14. The chief of the people. From v. 14 to Magpiash in v. 20 the personal names correspond to those of lay families that returned with Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:3–30; Neh. 7:8–33); the first 18 are personal names, two of which (v. 17) should be united by a hyphen, since it is clear that they represent the single family “After of Hezekiah,” mentioned in Ezra 2:16 and Neh. 7:21. (“Hizkijah” and “Hezekiah” are identical in the original Hebrew text.) The last three are names of localities: Nebai (v. 19), the same as Nebo (ch. 7:33); Magpiash (v. 20), the same as Magbish (Ezra 2:30); and Anathoth. The others (from Meshullam to Baanah, Neh. 10:20–27) are names either of the heads of the different houses into which these families were divided or of the elders of the smaller towns of Benjamin and Judah. That not all the families listed in Ezra 2 appear in this list may be due to the fact that some may have merged, though there is also evidence that during the course of years fresh accessions to the number of families had occurred.

28. The rest of the people. The enumeration of classes is the same as in Ezra 2:70. Since no class of people is missing, there was evidently a general, perhaps universal, concurrence on the part of the nation with the provisions of the covenant.

They that had separated. This class may have descended from those Israelites who had been left in the land at the time of the Captivity, and who now joined the new community (see on Ezra 6:21).

Every one having knowledge. It is interesting to notice that, contrary to Oriental usage, women and mature young people also signed the covenant. All those old enough to understand the nature of the covenant were allowed to participate in the sacred ritual. It is unlikely that only the educated class is meant, as some commentators have suggested.

29. They clave. The common people gave their support to the leaders who had attached their seals to the document, in this way approving and ratifying what they had done.

A curse. It is possible that the curses and blessings of Deut. 27 and 28 had been included in the readings taken from the law. An oath was probably taken of the people each time the covenant between God and His people was confirmed (see Deut. 29:12; 2 Kings 23:3).

The servant of God. This title belongs to Moses in a unique way. God called him “my servant Moses,” who is “faithful in all mine house” (Num. 12:7), and from that time forward this was his special title (see Joshua 1:2; 8:31, 33; 1 Chron. 6:49; 2 Chron. 24:9; Dan. 9:11; Heb. 3:5).

30. Not give our daughters. Apparently the reform instituted by Ezra (Ezra 9, 10) had not proved lasting (see on Neh. 13:23).

31. On the sabbath. The prohibition of commerce on the Sabbath, though not specifically mentioned in the fourth commandment, is implicit in it, and is certainly included in regulations pertaining to that day. Amos 8:5 implies this prohibition, as well as Isa. 58:13 and Jer. 17:19–27. The earliest non-Biblical evidence for the observance of the weekly Sabbath among the Jews comes from the 5th century B.C., from Elephantine in Egypt. This mention of the Sabbath is found on ostraca, or potsherds, that is, pieces of broken pottery commonly used as inexpensive writing material.

The holy day. Rather, “a holy day,” meaning that the people bound themselves to refrain from trading not only on the Sabbath but on any holy day.

Leave the seventh year. An abbreviated statement of the law concerning the sabbatical year (Ex. 23:10, 11), according to which the land was to lie untilled and unsown during that year. This law had frequently been neglected during the times of the monarchy, and its neglect was one of the sins the Captivity was expressly intended to punish (2 Chron. 36:21). It now appears that after the return this regulation had again been disobeyed.

Debt. For comment, see on ch. 5:12–13.

32. The third part of a shekel. It is not stated who were to make this contribution for the upkeep of the Temple service, but it was a well-known custom. This payment was evidently a revival of the Mosaic precept (Ex. 30:13) that every man of 20 years of age and upward should give half a shekel as an offering to the Lord, a tribute still required in Christ’s day (Matt. 17:24). In consideration of the poverty of the greater portion of the community, this tax was now lowered to a third of a shekel for each man. The opinion of Ibn Ezra, the great Jewish commentator of the Middle Ages, that a third of a shekel was to be paid in addition to the half shekel levied in conformity with the law, is unsupported by the text.

For the service. This fund was not for building expenses or for repair work on the Temple, but for maintaining the regular Temple services. According to v. 33 this tax was to be used to supply the shewbread, the continual meat and burnt offerings (Num. 28:3–8), sacrifices for the Sabbath day and the new moon (ch. 28:9–15), and for other festivals (chs. 28:16 to 29:40).

33. Holy things. The “wave offerings” and “peace offerings” (Lev. 23:10, 17, 19) are probably intended, since they were “holy to the Lord for the priest” (Lev. 23:20). Further, this tax covered the sin offerings commanded in Num. 28:15, 22, 30; 29:5, 11, 16, 19;

etc., and whatever else might be necessary. The establishment of such a tax does not necessarily mean that the contributions promised by Artaxerxes in his edict (Ezra 7:20–22) had ceased, and that the congregation now found it necessary to defray the expenses from their own resources. In addition to the assistance afforded by the king it now found necessary to provide for increased requirements of the Temple.

34. *The wood offering.* The law of Moses merely prescribed that wood should constantly be burning on the altar, and that the priest should lay wood on it every morning (Lev. 6:12, 13). However, no directions were given concerning the procurement of the wood. This covenant made it the business of the congregation to furnish the necessary wood, and the various houses were successively responsible for this need, in the order decided by casting lots. According to Josephus (*Wars* ii. 17. 6) the wood needed for a year was brought in on a stated day, the 14th day of the 5th month, which was kept as a festival called “the wood carrying.”

35. *The firstfruits.* For those of the ground, see Ex. 23:19; 34:26; Deut. 26:2; for those of the fruit trees, see Lev. 19:23.

36. *Firstborn of our sons.* These were to be redeemed according to the estimation of the priest (Num. 18:16), as were also unclean cattle (Num. 18:15). The firstlings of the herds and of the flocks had to be offered on the altar (Num. 18:17).

37. *Firstfruits of our dough.* See Num. 15:18–21.

Our offerings. Literally, “our heave offering” (see Num. 15:20; Lev. 23:11, 17).

The chambers of the house. The storerooms attached to the Temple building (see ch. 13:4, 5).

The tithes of our ground. The tithe seems to have been neglected by many, with the result that the priests and Levites could not attend to their Temple duties, and were compelled to earn their living otherwise (see ch. 13:10). The people now solemnly promised to resume the practice. Malachi, who also prophesied about this time, discusses the same problem and reminds the people of the disadvantages of withholding the tithe and the blessings that accompanied faithfulness (Mal. 3:8–12). On the law of tithe paying under an agricultural economy, see Lev. 27:30.

In all the cities. It seems that the agricultural tithes were not brought to Jerusalem, but stored up in centers where they were produced until claimed by the Levites. It is not clear whether storehouses were provided in these cities for this purpose or whether Levitical cities are meant.

Tillage. Literally, “work.”

38. *The priest.* A priest was to be present when the Levites took the tithe, not so much as a guarantee that they would receive their share, as some commentators have thought, but to secure the priests’ share, the tithe of the Levites’ tithe (Num. 18:26). According to this verse, the tithe was to be conveyed to Jerusalem at the expense of the recipients, and it was only fair for the priest to share in the work of transporting it there. This regulation must also have been designed as a guarantee of the proper handling of sacred funds. The presence of representatives of the two ecclesiastical orders at the time the tithe was received and divided would tend to avoid mismanagement of these funds.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

29–36PK 667

32, 33 PP 526

CHAPTER 11

1 *The rulers, voluntary men, and the tenth man chosen by lot, dwell at Jerusalem.* 3 *A catalogue of their names.* 20 *The residue dwell in other cities.*

1. Dwelt at Jerusalem. This narrative continues the story of ch. 7:4, and gives an account of measures taken to carry out Nehemiah's resolution to repopulate Jerusalem. Jerusalem was already the residence of the nobles or tribal heads (see chs. 2:16; 5:17), and no increase could be expected in this direction. Nehemiah had therefore found it necessary to look to other classes of the population in order to obtain new settlers for the capital.

Cast lots. Anciently the Jews frequently used the lot to determine matters where human judgment seemed insufficient, in the belief that "the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord" (Prov. 16:33). Divine sanction had been given, in the course of the history of God's people, to the use of the lot for the selection of persons (Joshua 7:16–18; 1 Sam. 10:19–21), for the distribution of lands (Num. 26:55, 56), and for determining the order in which different groups should execute their duties (1 Chron. 24:5; 25:8).

The holy city. This designation occurs in the prophecies of Isa. 48:2; 52:1; Dan. 9:24; Joel 3:17, but is used here for the first time in a historical narrative. From now on its use becomes more frequent (see Matt. 4:5; 27:53; Rev. 11:2; etc.), until it received the Arabic name *el-Quds*, "The Holy (place)." This it has retained as its official name until the present day.

2. Willingly offered. In addition to those on whom the lot fell and who accepted it as indicating their responsibility to move to Jerusalem, there were certain volunteers who moved with their families into the city. Their fellow countrymen invoked blessings upon them for their patriotism.

3. Chief of the province. That is, the province of Judah as part of the Persian Empire. The chief men of the province are contrasted in the writer's mind with the Jewish heads of families who lived in Babylon or in other parts of the empire.

Dwelt in Jerusalem. That is, census of all "the chief of the province" living there subsequent to the transfer.

Israel. A collective designation for members of all the tribes, with the exception of the Levites. According to 1 Chron. 9:3 it is evident that among those who had returned were members of the two great tribes of Israel, Manasseh and Ephraim. The citizens are treated by classes, as in other lists, and the laity precede the Temple officers.

4. At Jerusalem dwelt. Not that all the inhabitants of Jerusalem were of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin only; there were many Levites (vs. 10–19), probably also Manassites and Ephraimites (Chron. 9:3), and also the Nethinims (Neh. 11:21), who did not belong to any tribe. There may also have been representatives of other tribes. However, men of Judah and Benjamin seem to have constituted the majority of the population, and therefore they alone are mentioned. A parallel list of the inhabitants of Jerusalem is found in 1 Chron. 9, which may be based on a somewhat later census, since all numbers are higher than in Neh. 11.

Athaiah. In 1 Chron. 9:4 the name is given as Uthai. The ancestors assigned to Athaiah here and in 1 Chron. 9 are different, with the exception of Pharez (Perez), the son of Judah. But each list is probably an abbreviation of a far longer one, and the two writers have not in all cases selected the same names for their genealogies.

5. Shiloni. Since it seems strange for a Jew to have come from Shiloh, a city in the northern kingdom of Israel, the Masoretic vocalization of this word is probably incorrect.

The phrase should probably be rendered, “the son of a Shelanite,” meaning a descendant of Shelah, Judah’s third son, father of “the family of the Shelanites” (Num. 26:20).

6. Valiant men. Judah furnished 468 men capable of bearing arms, about half as many as Benjamin, which provided 928 men (v. 8). The cities of Judah lying south of Jerusalem may not have felt the necessity of keeping the capital strong, as did the Benjamites who dwelt in the real danger zone, the border of Samaria.

7. Sallu the son of Meshullam. Compare 1 Chron. 9:7. The other names in the genealogy are different, perhaps for the same reason noted in v. 4.

8. Nine hundred twenty and eight. The census of 1 Chron. 9:9 contains 956 men. Apparently, the number of Benjamites in Jerusalem had increased but slightly between the two censuses. In contrast, Judah shows an increase in its Jerusalem population from 468 to 690 during the same period of time. The increase may have been due in part to the fact that an additional Jewish family settled in Jerusalem, that of Zerah, Judah’s fifth son (1 Chron. 9:6).

10. Jedaiah. According to 1 Chron. 9:10 the three names there given belong to three different priestly families. According, it appears that the Heb. *ben*, “the son of,” is probably a copyist’s error. Jedaiah and Joiarib represented two of the chief priestly families, and are usually mentioned together (1 Chron. 24:7; Neh. 12:19; etc.). Jachin was a priestly family of much less distinction, probably descended from the head of the 21st priestly course in David’s time (1 Chron. 24:17).

11. Seraiah. This name designates the family of the high priest (chs. 10:2; 12:1, 12). The ancestor meant was probably the high priest taken prisoner by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 25:18–21).

The son of Hilkiah. As so frequently in the Bible “son” stands for “grandson” (see Ezra. 7:1; see on 1 Chron. 2:7).

The ruler. The high priest is meant, though his name is not given. In Nehemiah’s time Eliashib filled this office (see chs. 12:10; 13:4), but here only the name of his ancestral family is given.

12. Their brethren that did the work. That is, priests of ordinary rank. According to vs. 12–14, 1,192 priests were now living in Jerusalem. Thus, of the 4,289 who returned with Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:36–39) and others later with Ezra (ch. 8:24; etc.), only one in three or four lived in Jerusalem. When the census of 1 Chron. 9 was taken, the priestly population of Jerusalem had grown to 1,760 (v. 13).

14. One of the great men. Heb. *haggadolim*. This, possibly, should be considered a proper name (see RSV and the margin of the KJV).

16. The oversight. The three Levites here named were in charge of the material requirements and financial affairs of the Temple. They are also mentioned in Neh. 8:7; 12:34, 42 as prominent Levites (see 1 Chron. 26:29).

18. All the Levites. The small number of Levites, 284 as compared with 1,192 priests, is obvious here as in Ezra (see on Ezra 2:40).

19. The porters. For their names, see Ezra 2:42.

21. The Nethinims. On the Nethinims, see on Ezra 2:43; for those who lived on Ophel, see Neh. 3:26.

22. The overseer. This verse should be translated as a single sentence rather than as two sentences, and the word “were,” which is not in the Hebrew, omitted. Uzzi was overseer of the singing in the Temple. As the men mentioned in vs. 15, 16 had “the

oversight of the outward business,” so affairs within the Temple were under the supervision of Uzzi. He also participated in the wall dedication (ch. 12:42).

23. *The king’s commandment.* Not that of David, who once regulated the services of the Levites (1 Chron. 25), but of the Persian king Artaxerxes I, who, it appears, assigned a certain daily stipend from the royal revenue for the support of the singing Levites. The reason for this special favor may have been that the Levitical choir was to pray “for the life of the king, and of his sons” (Ezra 6:10), and that the few singing Levites who returned from Babylon had to be on constant duty in the Temple.

24. *At the king’s hand.* Pethahiah’s office was similar to that held by Ezra (see on Ezra 7:12). An intermediary between the Persian court and Judea, he may have been a courier assigned to liaison duties.

25. *The villages.* Nehemiah now leaves the city population of Jerusalem to give a list of towns apparently belonging to the province of Judea. This list makes possible a map of Judea of the time of Nehemiah on a somewhat more secure basis than would otherwise be possible, see *The Province of Judah in Nehemiah’s Time*. However, the list as given here is incomplete, since a number of cities mentioned in Ezra 2:20–34 and Neh. 3 known to be populated by Jews in the postexilic period are not listed.

Kirjath-arba. An older name of Hebron (Judges 1:10), and apparently based on the name of its founder Arba, one of the Anakim (Joshua 14:15; 15:13; 21:11). It is of interest to note that the ancient name was restored after the Captivity.

Dibon. Thought to be a variant spelling of Dimonah, listed among cities of the Negeb in Joshua 15:21–26. If so, it would have been in the neighborhood of Aroer, now ‘Ar‘arah, about 12 mi. (7.4 km.) southeast of Beersheba. Dibon itself, however, has not yet been located.

Jekabzeel. This unidentified place seems to have been the same as Kabzeel, in the extreme south of Judah.

26. *Jeshua.* Now *Tell es–Sa’si*, about 8½ mi. (13.6 km.) east-northeast of Beersheba.

Moladah. Perhaps at the site of *Tell elt–Milh*, about 10 mi. (16 km.) southeast of Beersheba.

Beth-phelet. Probably near Beersheba, but still unidentified (see Joshua 15:27).

27. *Hazar-shual.* Another place in the vicinity of Beersheba not yet identified (Joshua 15:28). The name means the “Village of the Fox.”

28. *Ziklag.* Celebrated as the town given to David by Achish, king of Gath (1 Sam. 27:6), and soon afterward taken by the Amalekites (1 Sam. 30:1). It was perhaps at the present site of *Tell el–Khuweilfeh*, some 10 mi. (16 km.) to the north of Beersheba.

Mekonah. An unknown place.

29. *En-rimmon.* Now *Khirbet Umm er–Ramamîn*, 8½ mi. (12.8 km.) north of Beersheba.

Zareah. Possibly the same as Zorah, now *Sar‘ah*, about 15 mi. (24 km.) west of Jerusalem.

Jarmuth. Now *Khirbet Yarmûk*, about 14 mi. (22.4 km.) west of Bethlehem.

30. *Zanoah.* Now *Khirbet Zanû‘*, 2 mi. (3.2 km.) northeast of Jarmuth.

Adullam. Now *Tell esh–Sheikh Madhkûr*, 10 mi. (16 km.) northwest of Hebron.

Lachish. Now *Tell ed–Duweir*, about 15 mi. (25.6 km.) northwest of Hebron, where excavations of importance took place during the years 1932–38, under the direction of J. L. Starkey (see Vol. I, p. 125).

Azekah. Now *Tell ez–Zakariyeh*, about 18 mi. southwest of Jerusalem. Like Adullam and Lachish, it was one of the cities fortified by Rehoboam (2 Chron. 11:9). Azekah and Lachish were the last cities to fall to Nebuchadnezzar's forces prior to the capture of Jerusalem (Jer. 34:7).

Beer-sheba unto the valley of Hinnom. For practical purposes, the southernmost and northernmost regions of the former tribe of Judah are here mentioned, a distance of about 40 mi. (64 km.) as the crow flies. The Valley of Hinnom lay immediately to the south of Jerusalem. Compare the similar expression, "from Dan even to Beer-sheba" (see on Judges 20:1).

31. From Geba dwelt at Michmash. Literally, "from Geba [to] Michmash." Geba is now *Jeba'*, 7 mi. (11.2 km.) north-northeast of Jerusalem, while Michmash, now called *Mukhmâs*, lies 2 mi. (3.2 km.) farther, to the northeast of Geba.

Aija. Identified as *et–Tell*, 11/2 mi. (2.4 km.) southeast of Bethel, a site excavated by a French expedition from 1933–35. It is uncertain whether Aija (*et–Tell*) is the Ai of Joshua 7 and 8 (see Vol. II, p. 42).

Beth-el. Now *Beitîn*, 11 mi. 17.6 km.) north of Jerusalem. Bethel played an important role in the history of Israel. It was there that Jacob had his dream of the ladder that reached to heaven (Gen. 28). Throughout the period of the kingdom of Israel Bethel was the location of one of the two apostate temples Jeroboam I founded (1 Kings 12:28, 29).

32. Anathoth. A Levitical city (Joshua 21:18), which had once been the home of Jeremiah (Jer. 1:1; 32:7). It is now called *Râs el–Kharruûbeh*, and lies less than 3 mi. northeast of Jerusalem.

Nob. This city, famous for the massacre of the priests by Doeg in the time of Saul (1 Sam. 22:18, 19, could be seen from Jerusalem (Isa. 10:32). It has tentatively been identified with *et–Tôr* on the Mt. of Olives.

Ananiah. This seems to be the OT name for Bethany, a town on the eastern slope of the Mt. of Olives, one that played an important role in the life of Christ. Its modern name is *el–‘Azarîyeh*.

33. Hazor. Now *Khirbet Hazzûr*, approximately 4 mi. (6.4 km.) to the north-northwest of Jerusalem.

Ramah. Probably *er–Râm*, 4 mi. (6.4 km.) northwest of Jerusalem.

Gittaim. A town in Benjamin, not yet identified.

34. Hadid. Now *el–Hadîtheh*, 31/2 mi. (4.8 km.) northeast of Lydda.

Zeboim. A town near Hadid, not yet identified.

Neballat. Now *Beit Nabala*, 2 mi. (3.2 km.) north of Hadid.

35. Lod. Lydda of NT times, now called *Ludd*. This city became important under the Maccabees (1 Macc. 11:34; etc.). It was later called Diospolis.

Ono. First mentioned in 1 Chron. 8:12, with Lod, as also in Ezra 2:33. It is now *Kefr'Ana*, 5 mi. (8 km.) northwest of Lydda.

Valley of the craftsmen. This valley, apparently in the vicinity of Ono and Lod, has not yet been identified.

36. Divisions. Verse 36 should read, "Divisions of the Levites in Judah were joined to Benjamin" (RSV). Apparently certain divisions of Levites, who according to former arrangements had been located in Judah, were now transferred to Benjamin. The census under Nehemiah may have revealed that a disproportionately great number of Levites were living in Judah.

CHAPTER 12

¹ *The priests, 8 and the Levites, which came up with Zerubbabel.* 10 *The succession of high priests.* 22 *Certain chief Levites.* 27 *The solemnity of the dedication of the walls.* 44 *The offices of priests and Levites appointed in the temple.*

1. The priests and the Levites. The list presented in vs. 1–9 is clarified by comparison with two parallel lists, that of the priestly families whose seals were set to the covenant (ch. 10:2–8), and that of the heads of the priestly courses under the high priest Joiakim (ch. 12:12–21). The number of names differs slightly from list to list, as do also the names and the order in which they appear. That they are family names is most evident from the third list.

From a comparison of the two lists in ch. 12 (columns 2, 3, 4) it is apparent that the names of the head of the house of Miniamin, and of both the house and head of the house of Hattush, are missing from the second list. In other respects the two lists agree both in the number and in the order in which they appear. However, a comparison of the two lists of ch. 12 with that of ch. 10 shows greater differences. Of the 22 names given in ch. 12:1–7 (21 names in vs. 12–21), 15 (14 in vs. 12–21) marked with an asterisk (*) occur also in ch. 10. But Pashur, Malchijah, Obadiah, Daniel, Baruch, and Meshullam of ch. 10 are missing in ch. 12. Some commentators have sought to explain this difference by supposing that a portion of the priests refused their signatures because they did not concur in the strict measures of Ezra and Nehemiah. This suggestion would be conceivable if only 15 heads of priestly families had signed the covenant instead of 21. Since, however, 6 other names appear instead of the 6 missing names, this cannot be the reason. The reason for the differences is probably the time lapse between the two lists. The list of ch. 12:1–7 is from the time of Zerubbabel, that of ch. 12:12–21 from the time of the high priest Joiakim, who probably held office during the latter part of the reign of Darius I, while that of ch. 10 dates from the reign of Artaxerxes I.

THE PRIESTLY NAME LISTS OF NEHEMIAH 10 AND 12			
Neh. 10:2-8	Neh. 12:1-7	Neh. 12:12-21	
Time of Nehemiah	Time of Zerubbabel	Time of Joiakim (c. 490 B.C.)	
(c. 444 B.C.)	(c. 536 B.C.)		
Priests	Heads of	Priestly Houses	Heads of Priestly Houses

Signing the Covenant	Priestly Houses		
1. Seraiah	1. Seraiah*	1. Seraiah*	1. Meraiah
2. Azariah	2. Jeremiah*	2. Jeremiah*	2. Hananiah
3. Jeremiah	3. Ezra*	3. Ezra*	3. Meshullam
4. Pashur	4. Amariah*	4. Amariah*	4. Jehohanan
5. Amariah	5. Malluch*	5. Melicu*	5. Jonathan
6. Malchijah	6. Hattush*		
7. Hattush	7. Shechaniah*	6. Shebaniah*	6. Joseph
8. Shebaniah	8. Rehum*	7. Harim*	7. Adna
9. Malluch	9. Meremoth*	8. Meraioth*	8. Helkai
10. Harim	10. Iddo	9. Iddo	9. Zechariah
11. Meremoth	11. Ginnetho*	10. Ginnethon*	10. Meshullam
12. Obadiah	12. Abijah*	11. Abijah*	11. Zichri
13. Daniel	13. Miamin*	12. Miniamin*	
14. Ginnethon	14. Maadiah*	13. Moadiah*	12. Piltai
15. Baruch	15. Bilgah*	14. Bilgah*	13. Shammua
16. Meshullam	16. Shemaiah*	15. Shemaiah*	14. Jehonathan
17. Abijah	17. Joiarib	16. Joiarib	15. Mattenai
18. Mijamin	18. Jedaiah	17. Jedaiah	16. Uzzi
19. Maaziah	19. Sallu	18. Sallai	17. Kallai
20. Bilgai	20. Amok	19. Amok	18. Eber
21. Shemaiah	21. Hilkiah	20. Hilkiah	19. Hashabiah
	22. Jedaiah	21. Jedaiah	20. Nethaneel

That there were 21 or 22 priestly heads in three different periods of postexilic Jewry seems to indicate that the priests were divided among 21 or 22 orders, or classes, as those of David's time were in 24 (1 Chron. 24). Why the original number of courses was not immediately restored after the Exile is unknown. By the time of Christ the full number of 24 priestly courses was officiating, according to Josephus (*Antiquities* vii. 14, 7), who claims rather inaccurately that David's division into orders continued until his day.

The difference between the names in the lists of chs. 10 and 12 can be explained on the basis that the names of those who sealed the covenant (ch. 10) are not names either of orders or of houses, but of heads of houses living in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. Of these, some compare with the names of the orders and houses, while the remainder are different. That some names are the same does not, however, prove that the individuals belonged to the house whose name they bore. Similarities between names in the two lists is accidental. According to ch. 12:13, 16, there were two men named Meshullam, one the head of the house of Ezra, the other of the house of Ginnethon. That only 21 houses are

mentioned in the lists of chs. 10 and 12:12–21 is perhaps due to a copyist's error. The suggestion made by some commentators that one priestly house became extinct, or was otherwise disqualified between the time of Cyrus and Darius I, seems highly improbable.

8. *The Levites.* Of those here mentioned, all but Mattaniah signed the covenant of ch. 10 (see ch. 10:9–13). Sherebiah and Jeshua (the son of Kadmiel) are again named as heads of Levitical divisions in ch. 12:24. The name Judah does not appear in any other list of Levites in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, and may possibly stand in place of Hodijah (ch. 10:10). Mattaniah is probably the same as the Mattaniah of ch. 11:17, who directed the first choral group.

9. *Bakbukiah.* The other song leader mentioned in ch. 11:17. The name Unni appears nowhere else in records of this time.

Over against them. The two choirs (see ch. 11:17) seem to have been arranged so as to stand facing each other as they sang.

Watches. Preferably, “service[s]” (RSV).

10. *Jeshua.* See on >Ezra 2:2. Verses 10, 11 present the genealogy of the high priests from the time of Zerubbabel to the time of the compilation of the book of Nehemiah. The genealogy is probably inserted here as a connecting link between the lists of Levites, to explain the statements concerning the dates of their composition, dates indicated by the names of the respective high priests. The list of vs. 1–9 is from the time of Jeshua, that of vs. 12–21, from that of Joiakim.

Joiakim. Mentioned only here and in vs. 12, 26. Since he was high priest between Jeshua, who was still living under Darius I (Ezra 5:2), and Eliashib, the high priest in Nehemiah's time (Neh. 3:1; 13:4; etc.), Joiakim seems to have officiated as high priest during the latter part of the reign of Darius I and under Xerxes, perhaps down to the early years of Artaxerxes I.

Eliashib. The officiating high priest in Nehemiah's time (see on ch. 3:1).

Joiada. High priest between Nehemiah's term of office as governor and the year 410 B.C., when Johanan is attested as high priest (see pp. 80, 372).

11. *Jonathan.* Either an alternate name for Johanan (see vs. 22, 23) or the result of a copyist's error. Johanan is confirmed by the Elephantine papyri as high priest in 410 B.C. (see pp. 80, 372), probably also in 407, when the papyri containing his name were written.

Josephus, who speaks of him as Jannaeus (John), says that he murdered his own brother, Jesus (Jeshua, or Joshua), in the Temple, when Jeshua attempted to wrest the high priesthood from him through the influence of the Persians. This in turn gave Bagoas, the general of Artaxerxes II (Mnemon), an opportunity to take severe measures against the Jews (*Antiquities* xi. 7. 1). This information may be correct, for the Elephantine papyri give the name of the Persian governor in Johanan's time as Bigvai, the Persian equivalent of the Greek Bagoas or Bagoses.

Jaddua. See p. 372. Unless this list omits a generation or two (see on v. 1), the Jaddua of Alexander's days mentioned by Josephus (*Antiquities* xi. 8. 4, 5) was probably another individual, possibly a son or grandson of this Jaddua.

12. *Priests.* For vs. 12–21, see on v. 1.

22. *Eliashib.* For the high priests here mentioned, see on vs. 10, 11.

Darius the Persian. The “reign of Darius” seems to be the terminal point of the author's various lists of ecclesiastical officers. The Darius of this verse is either Darius II

(424/23–405/04 B.C.) or Darius III, the last Persian monarch (336–331 B.C.), who was defeated by Alexander the Great. Most commentators identify “Darius the Persian” with Darius III, on the basis that the Jaddua of Josephus (*Antiquities* xi 8. 4, 5) is the Jaddua of Neh. 12:11 and 22. But it is far from certain that Josephus’ Jaddua is to be identified with the Jaddua of Neh. 12:11 (see p. 372). It is far more probable that “Darius the Persian” is Darius II. That this term is no evidence for a late authorship of the book of Nehemiah, as has sometimes been asserted, is apparent from the use of the same term by Herodotus (ii. 110, 158).

23. The book of the chronicles. The document in which the list of Levites was originally included. This book was a day-by-day record of events of national importance, and was a continuation of the earlier annals of the kingdom.

24. Chief of the Levites. The names Hashabiah, Sherebiah, Jeshua, and Kadmiel occur frequently as those of the heads of Levitical orders, the first two in Ezra 8:18, 19 and Neh. 10:11, 12, the last two in Ezra 2:40 and Neh. 10:9; 12:8.

The son of. Heb. *ben*. This should perhaps read *Binnuy*, the Binnui of v. 8 (see Ezra 8:33; Neh. 3:24; 10:9). Ezra 2:40 and 10:9 (cf. Neh. 12:8) seem to make it impossible that Jeshua could have been “the son of” Kadmiel.

The commandment of David. Compare 1 Chron. 15:16; 23:5; 25:3.

Man of God. This title is not often applied to David, but occurs again in Neh. 12:36, and also in 2 Chron. 8:14. Chronicles was probably written by the same author as Ezra and Nehemiah (see Introduction to Chronicles).

Ward over against ward. This phrase is used of the gatekeepers in 1 Chron. 26:16. Here it is used to describe the position of the companies of singers in divine worship, probably meaning that the groups were arranged opposite each other and sang responsively.

25. Mattaniah, and Bakbukiah, Obadiah. Mattaniah and Bakbukiah are mentioned in ch. 11:17 as leaders of two choirs. With them was Abda (a variant spelling for Obadiah). The apparent difficulty of their being listed here among the “porters” disappears when the three names are considered as clearly belonging to v. 24 (see on v. 24).

Meshullam, Talmon, Akkub. Chiefs of the doorkeepers. The last two names occur as such both in Ezra 2:42 and Neh. 11:19, and even in 1 Chron. 9:17. Accordingly, these were the ancient names of houses of Levitical doorkeepers.

Thresholds. More accurately, “treasuries,” as in the KJV margin, or “storehouses” (RSV). The “porters” were the Temple police, and therefore guarded the storerooms and treasury of the Temple. These may have been in close proximity to the gates, as some commentators think.

26. These were in the days. With v. 26 the two lists in vs. 12–21 and 24, 25 are concluded.

27. The dedication. The events recorded in vs. 27–43 must have occurred soon after the completion of the wall, and not many years later as some have suggested. Accordingly, this document, like others in Nehemiah, is not given in chronological order.

This is the first description in the Bible of the dedication of a city wall. Whether another ceremony such as this had ever taken place in Israel is not known. Houses were dedicated (Deut. 20:5), as was also the Temple (1 Kings 8; Ezra 6:16). The same may also have been true of a city wall and public buildings. When the high priest and his

associate priests had finished building their section of the wall, they immediately “sanctified it” (Neh. 3:1), probably with a ceremony, and in so doing may have inspired Nehemiah to plan an appropriate ceremony of consecration for the entire wall upon its completion. Such an act placed the whole circuit of the wall under divine protection, in recognition of the fact that walls are useless unless God Himself defends them (see Zech. 2:5).

Psalteries. Heb. *nebalim*, a kind of harp. It was probably portable and had its sounding box at the top, like harps depicted on Assyrian reliefs (see p. 32). This agrees with an explanation of the word *nebel* given by Jerome. Egyptian harps were much larger and had their sounding box at the bottom of the instrument (see p. 33).

Harps. Heb. *kinnoroth*. A *kinnor* was a lyre rather than a harp.

28. *Netophathi.* Netophah has been identified with the site *Khirbet Bedd Falûh*, about 3 1/2 mi. (5.6 km.) southeast of Bethlehem.

29. *House of Gilgal.* Heb. *Bethhaggilgal*, a town generally identified with the Gilgal of Joshua 15:7, about halfway between Jericho and Jordan (see on Joshua 15:7).

Geba and Azmaveth. See on Ezra 2:26, 24. All the towns mentioned in Neh. 12:28 and 29 were situated close to Jerusalem, and the singers, who built them, would accordingly be conveniently located for attending the Temple services.

30. *Purified.* See Ezra 6:20 on the purification of priests and Levites. Inanimate things could also become legally defiled (Lev. 14:34–53; Deut. 23:14). In case either the wall or the gates should thus become ceremonially unclean, they were required to undergo legal purification prior to the ceremony of dedication.

31. *Two great companies.* Nehemiah ordered all the leaders of the nation, both secular and ecclesiastical, to mount the wall. There he divided them into two companies, each composed of both clergy and laity, and placed one of them under the direction of Ezra (v. 36) and took command of the other himself (v. 38). The assembling point seems to have been the Valley Gate—between the Dung Gate and the Tower of the Furnaces—because Ezra’s company marched toward the Dung Gate, the first mentioned landmark, while Nehemiah’s group first passed the Tower of the Furnaces (vs. 31 and 38). On the possible location of the Valley Gate see on ch. 2:13. Ezra’s company moved toward the southeastern corner of Jerusalem, and after passing the Dung and Fountain gates, moved along on top of the eastern wall, passing the Water Gate. Nehemiah’s company proceeded northward, and in succession passed the Tower of the Furnaces, the Broad Wall, the Gate of Ephraim, the Old Gate, the Fish Gate, the towers Hananeel and Meah, and the Sheep and Prison gates. Between the Prison Gate and the Water Gate the two companies apparently met, and from there entered the Temple. Concerning the topography of the wall and the gates, see on chs. 2:13–15; 3:1–32, also the Additional Note on ch. 3.

32. *Hoshaiah.* Perhaps the Hoshea of ch. 10:23 who sealed the covenant.

Half of the princes. The other half were with Nehemiah (v. 40).

33. *And Azariah, Ezra, and Meshullam.* Probably representatives of but two priestly families. The “and” preceding Azariah should be translated “even,” or “namely,” and the entire verse rendered, “Namely Azariah, who is Ezra, and Meshullam” (see ch. 10:2, 7).

This Ezra should be distinguished from Ezra, the leader of the company, mentioned in ch. 12:36.

34. Judah, and Benjamin. Certain lay people belonging to these tribes seem to be meant.

Shemaiah, and Jeremiah. Representatives of two more priestly families (see chs. 10:2, 8; 12:1, 6).

35. With trumpets. Each procession was accompanied by a body of priests who blew the trumpets (v. 41), the leader of Ezra's company being Zechariah, a descendant of Asaph. With him were eight trumpeters, listed in v. 36.

36. Musical instruments. See Neh. 12:27; cf. 2 Chron. 29:26; 1 Chron. 15:16; 23:5; Ezra 3:10.

Ezra the scribe. Ezra was the leader of the entire company. He had returned from Babylon 13 years before Nehemiah (Ezra 7; Neh. 2:1), and is also found as the spiritual leader of the people during the ceremonies of the 7th month (Neh. 8:1–15).

37. Fountain gate. See on ch. 2:14.

Which was. Insertion of these words, which are not in the Hebrew, makes it appear that the Fountain Gate was “over against them.” According to the Hebrew, the “stairs” were “over against them.” When the procession reached the Fountain Gate, it ascended to the City of David by way of the steps here mentioned, ascended the wall once more, and followed its course to the Water Gate (see on ch. 3:26), which overlooked the Kidron Valley. Somewhere above the Water Gate Ezra's group met that of Nehemiah. Together they entered the Temple courts.

38. The other company. This group was led by Nehemiah. Starting from the Valley Gate (see on v. 31), this company first went north past the Tower of the Furnaces (see on ch. 3:11), and the Broad Wall (see on ch. 3:8).

39. The gate of Ephraim. This gate, which must have been located between the Broad Wall and the Old Gate, is not mentioned in the description of the building of the wall in ch. 3. Either it had not been in need of repair or the part of the list mentioning it has been lost from the text. From the Gate of Ephraim the procession continued along the top of the wall and “above,” or over, the gates—the Old Gate (see ch. 3:6), the Fish Gate (ch. 3:3), the towers Hananeel and Meah, and the Sheep Gate (ch. 3:1).

The prison gate. What has been said of the Gate of Ephraim is true also of this gate. It must have been located in the northern section of the eastern wall, south of the Sheep Gate. Passing this gate, Nehemiah's group must have entered the Temple area, as v. 40 indicates, perhaps by the Gate Miphkad (see on ch. 3:31).

40. Half of the rulers. Compare v. 32.

41. The priests. The seven priestly trumpeters correspond to the eight in Ezra's group (see on v. 36).

42. Maaseiah. The role of Maaseiah and the seven men here mentioned is not clear.

43. Great sacrifices. Since the time of David it had become customary to offer numerous sacrifices at the dedication of important buildings (see 1 Kings 8:5; Ezra 6:17; cf. 2 Sam. 6:17; 24:25). Thus, Nehemiah followed an established custom.

The wives. Jewish women are not frequently mentioned in the Bible as taking part in public festivities. The only other occasion in which women are recorded as having taken part in a general celebration was at the Red Sea, under the leadership of Miriam (Ex. 15:20).

Heard even afar off. See Ezra 3:13; cf. 1 Kings 1:40; 2 Kings 11:13.

44. Some appointed. In view of the fact that the nation had promised to be faithful in rendering their tithes and offerings (ch. 10:32–37), provision was now made for administering the expected Temple revenues. Since the tithes and offerings were paid in produce—grain, wine, oil, etc. (see ch. 13:5)—spacious storage rooms were needed, with men to be in charge of them.

Judah rejoiced. There was a spirit of harmony between laity and clergy, and everyone contributed willingly.

45. Both the singers. The Hebrew text reads, “And they [the Levites] performed the service of their God and the service of purification, as did the singers and the gatekeepers, according to the command of David and his son Solomon” (RSV). On this command of David and Solomon compare 2 Chron. 8:14.

46. Days of David and Asaph. Verse 46 explains the phrase “according to the commandment of David” of v. 45. The musical service, says Nehemiah, together with the arrangement of personnel and the songs used, originated in the days of David and his chief song leader, Asaph.

47. All Israel. Israel fulfilled their obligations toward the Temple service in the days of Zerubbabel and Nehemiah by paying their tithes and other dues, as required by law (see on Neh. 10:32–37 and Num. 18:29).

4

CHAPTER 13

¹ Upon the reading of the law separation is made from the mixed multitude. ⁴ Nehemiah at his return causeth the chambers to be cleansed. ¹⁰ He reformeth the offices in the house of God. ¹⁵ The violation of the sabbath, ²³ and the marriages with strange wives.

1. On that day. This phrase is probably equivalent to “about that time.” According to v. 6, events in ch. 13 occurred during the second term of Nehemiah’s governorship after a period of absence from Judea.

They read. It is not clear whether this reading of the law was the one prescribed by law in connection with the Feast of Tabernacles (Deut. 31:10–13; see on Neh. 8:1, 8, 18), or whether Nehemiah ordered it because of the conditions he found in Judea, conditions that urgently needed correction.

Therein was found written. The content of this command, found in Deut. 23:3–5, is given in full, though slightly abbreviated in form.

2. God turned the curse. On Balaam see Num. 22 to 24. That his curses were turned into blessings is recorded in Num. 24:10.

3. The mixed multitude. Heb. *‘ereb*. This word is used in Ex. 12:38 of the “mixed multitude” of Egyptians who joined the Israelites. Here it is applied to non-Jews of various nationalities resident among the Israelites. A procedure similar to that carried out earlier under Ezra (Ezra 10:10–19) may have taken place. Since this action is referred to again in v. 30, and a severe rebuke for heathen marriages was administered (vs. 25–27), the process may not have been easy. Dealing with affairs people regard as their private business often arouses unpleasant feelings.

⁴Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ne 6:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

4. Was allied unto Tobiah. Eliashib was high priest (see chs. 3:1; 12:10, 22; 13:28); Tobiah was the Ammonite enemy of Nehemiah who had sought to hinder the building of the wall during Nehemiah's first governorship (ch. 2:10, 19; etc.). The alliance has usually been interpreted as referring to relationship established by marriage.

5. A great chamber. As high priest Eliashib was in charge of the entire Temple area, and during Nehemiah's absence assigned one of the best rooms of the Temple to Tobiah, who evidently used it as a place of residence (v. 8). During Nehemiah's rule Tobiah kept up a correspondence with leaders in Jerusalem, but could not get into the city. Now that the governor was away he not only succeeded in entering the city, but actually took up residence in the Temple. Such a desecration was unheard of, the more so since this particular room, or "chamber," had been set apart for the offerings and gifts of the people.

6. In all this time. Literally, "And during all this," that is, the affairs of Eliashib and Tobiah.

The two and thirtieth year. See on ch. 5:14.

King of Babylon. This title had been borne by Cyrus, Cambyses, Darius I, and by Xerxes during the early years of his reign. It had been officially abolished by the latter after the two rebellions that occurred during his reign. Nehemiah probably uses the title by which he had been so long accustomed to call the king of Persia.

After certain days. Literally "at the end of days," denoting a definite interval of time (see on Gen. 4:3). The view of some commentators that it means a year lacks evidence. The stay of Nehemiah at the court of Persia must have continued longer than a year, for it seems unlikely that so many illegal acts on the part of the Jewish community as Nehemiah discovered upon his return could have occurred in so short a time.

Leave. It is from this passage only that we know of Nehemiah's two terms as governor. His first term was for 12 years (ch. 5:14), but no indication is given of the length of his second term. It must have ended before 407 B.C., when, we know from an Elephantine letter, the governor of Judea was Bigvai (see on ch. 12:11).

7. In the courts. The room Eliashib placed at Tobiah's disposal was not in the main building of the Temple, but in one of the buildings adjacent to it, within the sacred precincts of the Temple area. This, no doubt, made the desecration less flagrant than it otherwise would have been, but far from justified the act.

8. Household stuff. It appears that Tobiah used the chamber as a dwelling when he visited Jerusalem from time to time.

9. Cleansed the chambers. Previously only one "chamber" has been mentioned as being used by Tobiah (vs. 5, 7, 8), but the plural here seems to indicate that others in addition to the large room, or hall, of v. 5 were also involved. These other "chambers" may have been smaller, and were perhaps used by Tobiah for the members of his household or his retinue. These rooms had been polluted by their conversion into secular use, and a ceremonial cleansing was necessary. This might be performed in various ways, though usually by the symbolic ritual of blood or water (see Lev. 12; 14:4-32; 17:15, 16; etc.).

10. I perceived. What Nehemiah saw was that the Levites were absent, and that the Temple service was neglected. On inquiry, he ascertained the reason for their absence—tithe had not been paid. Since the Levites lived from the tithe and the first fruits, and these were held back, they had to earn a living from the fields surrounding the towns and the villages where they lived.

11. Then contended I. While the guilt of profaning the Temple lay especially with the priestly class, that of withholding the tithes was mainly chargeable to the rulers and nobles. As the leaders they had apparently set a bad example to the people, and were especially to be blamed for the deplorable conditions Nehemiah found upon his return to Jerusalem.

13. I made treasurers. Once more the tithes began flowing into the Temple treasury (v. 12) for the support of the ministry. The problem that confronted Nehemiah was to make sure of an equitable distribution, so that each would have his just share, and none would be neglected (see Acts 6:1–5).

Shelemiah. Of the four treasurers, one was a priest, one a Levite, one a secretary, and one a layman of rank. In this way the main classes of the population were represented. The individuals mentioned cannot be identified, though several of the names occur elsewhere in Nehemiah. Shelemiahs are mentioned in Ezra 10:39, 41; Neh. 3:30, but probably none of them is the Shelemiah here mentioned. Pedaiah may have been the man mentioned in ch. 8:4, who explained the law with Ezra. Hanan was a common name (see Neh. 8:7; Neh. 10:10, 22), but the person here designated seems to be mentioned nowhere else. Three Zadoks are listed in Nehemiah (chs. 3:4, 29; 10:21), but it is uncertain that any of them can be identified with this “scribe.”

The scribe. Heb. *sopher*, a “writer” or “secretary.”

14. Remember me. Similar requests by Nehemiah are recorded in chs. 5:19; 13:31; etc.

Offices. Rather, “observations,” as in the margin, or “service” (RSV).

15. In those days. An indefinite time notation, as in chs. 12:44; 13:1. It probably points to a time which lay somewhat later than the events just described. Nehemiah may have made a tour of the country try to observe how the Sabbath was being kept.

I testified against them. The treading of grapes in the wine press was the first step in the production of wine, and therefore a flagrant violation of the fourth commandment. The same was true of those who transported agricultural produce to the capital for sale. Some commentators have thought that the transport of grain was a necessity, so that it might be in the city early enough for the market on the next day. But the law made no provision for such an activity. That there was actual selling on the Sabbath is reported in v. 16. The last clause of v. 15 should therefore be understood to mean that Nehemiah warned them on the day, namely the Sabbath, on which they had transported the goods to Jerusalem and were actually selling them.

16. Men of Tyre. The law did not prohibit foreigners, from residing in Jerusalem, and Nehemiah does not object to the Tyrians as residents of the city.

Which brought fish. Fish was always a favorite article of food with the Israelites (Lev. 11:9; Num. 11:5; Deut. 14:9; Isa. 19:10; Matt. 15:34; Luke 24:42; etc.). Fish came chiefly from the Lake of Galilee and the Mediterranean.

17. I contended. As in the matter of the tithes, so in the matter of the Sabbath, the nobility seem to have been guilty, either because they had made no attempts to stop this trade or because they were engaged in it themselves.

18. Did not your fathers? The desecration of the Sabbath is among the sins most strongly denounced by Jeremiah (ch. 17:21–27) and Ezekiel (chs. 20:13; 22:8, 26; 23:38). According to Amos (ch. 8:5) the Sabbath had been kept more in the letter than in the spirit. Nehemiah also reminds the Jews that the great catastrophes under Nebuchadnezzar

had come as a result of the violation of the fourth commandment by their ancestors, as Jeremiah had predicted (ch. 17:27) a prophecy Nehemiah may have had in mind.

19. *Began to be dark.* Heb. *salal*, “grow shadowy.” Since creation the Bible day has begun at sunset (see on Gen. 1:5). The special feasts were kept “from even to even” (Lev. 23:32), and the weekly Sabbath likewise (see on Mark 1:32). Hence Nehemiah ruled that the gates of the city were to be shut some time before the actual beginning of the Sabbath. In so doing he purposed to protect the “fringes” of the sacred hours of God’s holy Sabbath. It is a desecration of the spirit of the Sabbath to carry on secular pursuits to the last permissible moment.

Some of my servants. See chs. 4:16; 5:16.

No burden. It was probably permissible for people to come and go on legitimate Sabbath errands, but guards were set to prevent the transport of merchandise on the Sabbath.

20. *Lodged without Jerusalem.* Arriving on the Sabbath and finding the gates shut, the merchants waited outside and there probably carried on the trade they would otherwise have carried on within the city. The shutting of the gates therefore resulted simply in the transfer of trading from the market place inside the city to the outside of the gate. For two Sabbaths this practice was carried on. Then Nehemiah took notice of it, and halted it by threatening to arrest merchants again found near the city with their wares on the Sabbath (v. 21).

22. *Keep the gates.* The assignment of his own servants to watch the gates (v. 19) on the Sabbath was probably temporary, while the more permanent charge was committed to those Levites whom Nehemiah had recently brought back to the city (v. 11). This duty had been entrusted to them when the gates were first set up (ch. 7:1), but had been neglected when the Levites, deprived of financial support, had left their duties in Jerusalem to make a living from the soil. After having engaged for some time in secular work, the Levites had to cleanse themselves before again attending to sacred duties.

Remember me. See on vs. 14, 31.

23. *In those days.* Compare on v. 15. Nehemiah here records in detail what he had done in the matter of mixed marriages, as recorded in vs. 1–3. Upon his return to Jerusalem his watchful eye observed that many Jews had again fallen into the same sin with which Ezra had had to deal on his arrival at Jerusalem in 457 B.C. (Ezra 9 and 10), and which was especially mentioned in the covenant entered into soon after the beginning of his first term as governor (Neh. 9:38; 10:1, 30). As long as Nehemiah had remained in Judea there was probably no serious violation of the covenant, but as soon as he left Judea foreign wives were apparently once more taken into the families of the Jews.

Wives of Ashdod. Philistine wives, of a race always hostile to Israel, and natives of a city that had recently been allied with Nehemiah’s bitter enemies (ch. 4:7).

Ammon, and of Moab. Compare Ezra 9:1 and Neh. 13:1.

24. *Their children.* If the marriages were contracted after Nehemiah’s departure, and he found born from those unions children who were able to talk, he must have been absent from Jerusalem for several years.

Half in the speech of Ashdod. Some expositors have thought that the children spoke a jargon half Hebrew and half foreign. It is more likely that the word “half” refers to the children born of these foreign women, who may in many instances have been second wives. Thus in some families half the children would not speak Hebrew correctly. “The

speech of Ashdod” may have been, not the original Philistine language, but Aramaic, now widely spoken throughout the Persian Empire. Nehemiah, who, as a Persian official certainly knew Aramaic, was probably not opposed to a knowledge of that language, but was indignant at finding that some of the youth were not able to speak Hebrew properly. The Moabite and Ammonite languages were dialects closely related to Hebrew, but the difference was nevertheless noticeable, and Nehemiah was distressed to find these foreign dialects gaining a foothold in Judea.

25. *Cursed them.* The seriousness of the cases, and the dangerous trend which they represented, weighed heavily upon Nehemiah, and led him to take the actions here described.

Plucked off their hair. Ezra had plucked off his own hair and beard as a sign of utter distress (Ezra 9:3). Plucking the hair of someone else seems to have been a recognized form of punishment (Isa. 50:6). The loss of the beard was in itself considered a great disgrace (2 Sam. 10:4).

26. *Did not Solomon?* The example was more likely than any other to move the Jews. What the author of 1 Kings 11:3 had euphemistically referred to as turning aside of the heart, Nehemiah bluntly and openly call “sins.”

No king like him. Compare 1 Kings 3:12, 13; 2 Chron. 1:12.

Beloved of his God. An allusion to 2 Sam. 12:24.

God made him king. See 1 Kings 4:1.

27. *Shall we then hearken?* With this question Nehemiah tells the transgressors that he and those of like sentiments would neither adopt the practice these men recommend nor permit them to do so. The example of Solomon was a sufficient warning of the results of such a course.

28. *The sons of Joiada.* The offender could hardly be Johanan, or Jonathan (ch. 12:10, 11), the successor of Joiada, but must have been another son whose name is not given. Eliashib, the high priest, must have been an old man by this time to have a grandson old enough to marry. That a member of the high priestly family had made such an alliance with the archenemy of Nehemiah was most annoying and humiliating to Nehemiah.

Sanballat. See on ch. 2:10. On Eliashib’s contemptible connections with the other enemy of Nehemiah, Tobiah, see ch. 13:4–9.

Chased him from me. This probably means that Nehemiah forced the offender to leave the country and become an exile. We may suppose that he refused to repudiate his foreign wife, and preferred to take refuge with Sanballat in Samaria.

29. *Defiled the priesthood.* Nehemiah considered such a marriage of a member of the high priest’s family a pollution of the priesthood, being opposed in principle, as it was, to the sacredness of the priestly office (see Lev. 21:7, 14).

The covenant of the priesthood. Not the covenant of the everlasting priesthood which God had granted to Phinehas (Num. 25:13), but the covenant God had concluded with the tribe of Levi and with Aaron and his descendants (Ex. 28:1). This covenant required the priests to be “holy unto their God” (Lev. 21:6, 8), who had chosen them to be ministers of His sanctuary and stewards of His grace.

With the expulsion of Sanballat’s son-in-law from Jerusalem may be connected the building of the schismatic temple of the Samaritans on Mt. Gerizim. Josephus relates (*Antiquities* xi. 7. 2) that Manasseh, a brother of the high priest Jaddua, married Nikaso, a

daughter of the satrap Sanballat, a Cuthite. When on that account the Jewish authorities excluded him from the priesthood, he established the temple and worship on Mt. Gerizim with the assistance of his father-in-law. Many other priests, presumably, made common cause with him. Josephus, however, places the story in the time of Alexander, about a century after Nehemiah. It is entirely possible that the story itself is true and that Josephus simply made a mistake in the time. We know that he places Sanballat 100 years too late (see p. 373). That Josephus calls the schismatic leader a brother of Jaddua, hence a grandson of Joiada, while the Bible calls him a son of Joiada, can easily be explained by assuming either that Josephus made a mistake, or that, as so often in the Bible, “one of the sons of Joiada” (v. 28) stands for “one of the grandsons of Joiada.”

30. *Thus cleansed I them.* This refers to the measures described in vs. 1–3 and 23–29.

Appointed the wards. That is, assigned duties to the various priests and Levites (see chs. 10:38, 39; 12:44–46; 13:13).

31. *The wood offering.* Persons were appointed to oversee the collection of the wood offering (ch. 10:34), and of the first fruits (ch. 10:35–37).

Remember me. Nehemiah closes his book with an expression characteristic of his personality (see chs. 5:19; 13:14, 22, 29). One of the main features of Nehemiah’s life and work is his constant and intimate fellowship with the Source of all strength and wisdom. His prayers were the secret of his success (see chs. 1:4–11; 2:4; 4:4, 5, 9; 5:19; 6:9, 14; 13:14, 22, 29).

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1–31PK 669–678

4–7PK 669

8–13PK 670

14 GC 481

15–19PK 671

18 PK 182

19 PK 667

20, 21 PK 672

22–25, 27PK 673

28, 29 PK 674

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⁵Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ne 13:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.